Jesse Russell, Ronald Cohn

Diwali

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Jesse Russell, Ronald Cohn

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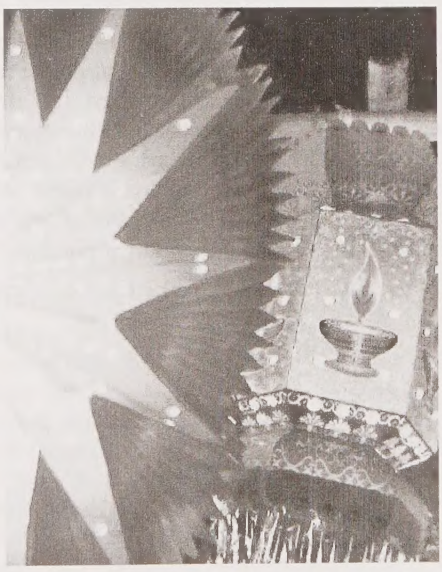
Diwali

Diwali (Dipawali)	
Diyas (oil lamp) during Diwali	
Also called	Translation: Row of Lights; Diwali, Festival of Lights
Observed by	Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists
Type	Religious, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Mauritius, Guyana, Trinidad & Tobago, Surinam, Malaysia, Singapore, and Fiji (National holiday in these countries)
Significance	Celebration of the victory of good over evil; the uplifting of spiritual darkness
Date	Decided by the luni-solar Hindu calendar
2011 date	5 November
2012 date	26 October
2013 date	3 November
Celebrations	Decorating homes with lights, Fireworks, distributing sweets and gifts
Observances	Prayers, Religious rituals (see puja, prashad)

Diwali (also spelled **Devali** in certain regions) or **Deepavali**[1], popularly known as the "**festival of lights,**" is a festival celebrated between mid-October and mid-December for different reasons.[2] For Hindus, Diwali is one of the most important festivals of the year and is celebrated in families by performing traditional activities together in their homes. For Jains, Diwali marks the attainment of *moksha* or *nirvana* by Mahavira in 527 BC.[3][4]

Diwali is an official holiday in India,[5] Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Mauritius, Guyana, Trinidad & Tobago, Suriname, Malaysia, Singapore,[6] and Fiji.[7]

The name "Diwali" is a contraction of "Deepavali" (Sanskrit: दीपावली *Dīpāvalī*), which translates into "row of lamps".[8] Diwali involves the lighting of small clay lamps (*diyas* or *dīpas*) in Sanskrit: दीप) filled with oil to signify the triumph of good over evil.[9] These lamps are kept on during the night and one's house is cleaned, both done in order to make the goddess Lakshmi feel welcome.[10] Firecrackers are burst in order to drive away evil spirits.[11][12][13] During Diwali, all the celebrants wear new clothes and share sweets and snacks with family members and friends.


Diwali lanterns

The festival starts with Dhanteras on which most Indian business communities begin their financial year. The second day of the festival, *Naraka Chaturdasi*, marks the vanquishing of the demon Naraka by Lord Krishna and his wife Satyabhama. *Amavasya*, the third day of Diwali, marks the worship of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth in her most benevolent mood, fulfilling the wishes of her devotees. Amavasya also tells the story of Lord Vishnu, who in his dwarf incarnation vanquished the Bali, and banished him to Patala. It is on the fourth day of Diwali, *Kartika Shudda Padyami*, that Bali went to patala and took the reins of his new kingdom in there. The fifth day is referred to as *Yama Dvitiya* (also called *Bhai Dooj*), and on this day sisters invite their brothers to their homes.

Dates

Diwali falls on the one new moon night (*Amavasya*) between mid-October and mid-December. This year it was on 26th October 2011. Diwali is celebrated for five days according to the lunisolar Hindu Calendar. It begins in late Ashvin (between September and October) and ends in early Kartika (between November and December). The days in Ashvin are in the *Krishna Paksha* ("dark fortnight") of that month, while the days in Kartik are in its *Shukla Paksha* ("bright fortnight"). The first day is *Dhan Teras*. The last day is *Yama Dvitiya*, which signifies the second day of the light half of Kartika. Each day of Diwali marks one celebration of the six principal stories associated with the festival.[14]

Krishna and Satyabhama fighting Narakasura's armies -Painting from the Metropolitan Museum

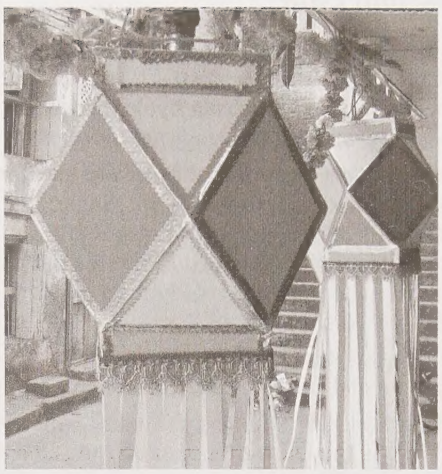
Hindus have several significant events associated with Diwali:

- The return of Rama after 14 years of Vanvas (banishment). To welcome his return, *diyas* (ghee lamps) were lit in rows of 20.
- The emergence of Goddess Lakshmi from the *Kshira Sagar* during Samudra manthan.
- The killing of Narakasura: Celebrated as Naraka Chaturdashi, one day before Diwali, it commemorates the killing of the evil demon Narakasura, who wreaked havoc. Krishna's wife Satyabhama killed Narakasura during the Dwapara yuga. In another version of the belief, the demon was killed by Krishna or Krishna provoked his wife Satyabhama to kill Narshna, defeating Indra.
- Govardhan Puja is celebrated the day after Diwali and is the day Krishna defeated Indra, the deity of thunder and rain. According to the story, Krishna saw preparations for an annual offering to Lord Indra and asked his father Nanda about it. He debated with the villagers about what their 'dharma' truly was. They were farmers, they should do their duty and concentrate on farming and protection of their cattle. He said that all human beings should do their 'karma' to the best of their ability and not pray for natural phenomenon. The villagers were convinced by Krishna, and did not proceed with the special puja (prayer). Indra was then angered, and flooded the village. Krishna lifted Mount Govardhan and held it up to protect the people and cattle from the rain. Indra finally accepted defeat and recognized Krishna as supreme. Although this aspect of Krishna's life is sometimes ignored it sets up the basis of the 'karma' philosophy later detailed in the *Bhagavat Gita*.

Other events associated with Diwali include:

- Return of Pandavas after 12 years of Vanvas and one year of agyatavas (living incognito).

Diwali celebrations are spread over five days, from Dhanteras to Bhaiduj. In some places like Maharashtra it starts with Vasu Baras.[15] All the days except Diwali are named according to their designation in the Hindu calendar. The days are:



Diwali being festival of lights, across India people celebrate it via symbolic diyas or kandils (colourful paper lanterns) as an integral part of Diwali decorations.

Rangoli, decorations made from coloured powder, is popular during Diwali

1. *Govatsa Dwadashi* or *Vasu Baras* (27 *Ashvin* or 12 *Krishna Paksha Ashvin*): *Go* means cow and *vatsa* means calf. *Dwadashi* or *Baras* means the 12th day. On this day the cow and calf are worshiped. The story associated with this day is that of King Prithu, son of the tyrant King Vena. Due to the ill rule of Vena, there was a terrible famine and earth stopped being fruitful. Prithu chased the earth, who is usually represented as cow, and 'milked' her, meaning that he brought prosperity to the land.
2. *Dhanatrayodashi or Dhan teras or Dhanwantari Triodasi*[16] (28 *Ashvin* or 13 *Krishna Paksha Ashvin*): *Dhana* means wealth and *Trayodashi* means 13th day. This day falls on the 13th day of the second half of the lunar month. It is considered an auspicious day for buying utensils and gold, hence the name 'Dhana'. This day is regarded as the Jayanti (Birth Anniversary) of God Dhanvantari, the Physician of Gods, who came out during Samudra manthan, the churning of the great ocean by the gods and the demons.
3. *Naraka Chaturdashi* (29 *Ashvin* or 14 *Krishna Paksha Ashvin*): *Chaturdashi* is the 14th day This was the day on which the demon Narakasura was killed by Krishna – an incarnation of Vishnu. It signifies the victory of good over evil and light over darkness (Gujarati: Kali Chaudas, Rajasthan : Roop Chaudas). In southern India, this is the actual day of festivities. Hindus wake up before dawn, have a fragrant oil bath and dress in new clothes. They light small lamps all around the house and draw elaborate kolams /rangolis outside their homes. They perform a special puja with offerings to Krishna or Vishnu, as he liberated the world from the demon Narakasura on this day. It is believed that taking a bath before sunrise, when the stars are still visible in the sky is equivalent to taking a bath in the holy Ganges. After the puja, children burst firecrackers heralding the defeat of the demon. As this is a day of rejoicing, many will have very elaborate breakfasts and lunches and meet family and friends.
4. *Lakshmi Puja* (30 *Ashvin* or 15 *Krishna Paksha Ashvin*): *Lakshmi Puja* marks the most important day of Diwali celebrations in North India. Hindu homes worship Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, and Ganesh, the God of auspicious beginnings, and then light lamps in the streets and homes to welcome prosperity and well-being.
5. *Bali Pratipada* and *Govardhan Puja* (1 *Kartika* or 1 *Shukla Paksha Kartika*) : In North India, this day is celebrated as *Govardhan Puja*, also called *Annakoot*, and is celebrated as the day Krishna – an incarnation of god Vishnu – defeated Indra and by the lifting of Govardhana hill to save his kinsmen and cattle from rain and floods. For *Annakoot*, large quantities of food are decorated symbolizing the Govardhan hill lifted by Krishna. In Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, it is celebrated as Bali-Pratipada or Bali Padyami. The day commemorates the victory of Vishnu in his dwarf form Vamana over the demon-king Bali, who was pushed into the patala. In Maharashtra, it is called as *Padava* or *Nava Diwas* (new day). Men present gifts to their wives on this day. It is celebrated as the first day of the Vikram Samvat calender, in Gujarat.
6. *Yama Dwitiya* or *Bhaiduj* (also Bhayyaduj, Bhaubeej or Bhayitika) (2 *Kartika* or 2 *Shukla Paksha Kartika*): on this day, brothers and sisters meet to express love and affection for each other (Gujarati: Bhai Bij, Bengali: Bhai Phota). It is based on a story when Yama, lord of Death, visited his sister Yami (the river Yamuna). Yami welcomed Yama with an Aarti and they had a feast together. Yama gave a gift to Yami while leaving as a token of his appreciation. So, the day is also called 'YAMA DWITIYA'. Brothers visit their sisters' place on this day and usually have a meal there, and also give gifts to their sisters.

Lakshmi Puja

Diwali marks the end of the harvest season in most of India. Farmers give thanks for the bounty of the year gone by, and pray for a good harvest for the year to come. Traditionally this marked the closing of accounts for businesses dependent on the agrarian cycle, and is the last major celebration before winter. Lakshmi symbolizes wealth and prosperity, and her blessings are invoked for a good year ahead.

There are two legends that associate the worship of Lakshmi on this day. According to the first legend, on this day, Lakshmi emerged from Kshira Sagar, the Ocean of Milk, during the great churning of the oceans, Samudra manthan. The second legend (more popular in western India) relates to the Vamana avatar of the big three Vishnu, the incarnation he assumed to kill the demon king Bali. On this day, Vishnu came back to his abode the Vaikuntha; so those who worship Lakshmi receive the benefit of her benevolent mood, and are blessed with mental, physical and material well-being.[17]

As per spiritual references, on this day "Lakshmi-panchayatan" enters the Universe. Vishnu, Indra, Kubera, Gajendra and Lakshmi are elements of this "panchayatan" (a group of five). The tasks of these elements are:

- Lakshmi: Divine Energy (Shakti) which provides energy to all the above activities.
- Vishnu: Happiness (happiness and satisfaction)
- Kubera: Wealth (generosity; one who shares wealth)
- Indra: Opulence (satisfaction due to wealth)
- Gajendra: Carries the wealth

Diwali greetings in some major Indian languages

- *Subha Dipawali ko mangalmaya subha kaamanaa* (शुभ दपिावली को मगलमय शुभ-कामना): Greeting in Nepali
- *Diwali ki Shubhkamnayein* (दवािली की शुभकामनाए ं): Greeting in Hindi
- *Diwali Mubarak* ( ): Greeting in Gujarati
- *Tuhanu diwali diyan boht boht vadhaiyan hon* (ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਦੀਵਾਲੀ ਦੀਆਂ ਬਹੁਤ ਬਹੁਤ ਵਧਾਈਆਂ ਹੋਣ): Greeting in Punjabi
- *Deepavali Nalvaazhtukkal* (தீபாவளி நல் வாழ்த்துக்கள்) :Greeting in Tamil
- *Deepavali Aashamsagal* (ദീപാവലി ആശംസകള്): Greeting in Malayalam.
- *Deepavali Habbada Shubhashayagalu* ( ): Greeting in Kannada
- *Deepavali Shubhakankshalu* ( ) : Greeting in Telugu
- *Shubh Diwali/ Diwalichya hardik Shubhechha* (शुभ दवािली /दवािळीचया हार्दकि शुभ ेचछा): Greeting in Marathi
- *Subho Diwalir Preeti O Subeccha* :Greeting in Bengali
- "Happy Diwali!" :Greeting in English language
- *Diwali mubarak ho*:Greeting in Hindi(bundelkhand) language

Spiritual Significance

While Diwali is popularly known as the "festival of lights", the most significant spiritual meaning is "the awareness of the inner light". Central to Hindu philosophy is the assertion that there is something beyond the physical body and mind which is pure, infinite, and eternal, called the *Atman*. The celebration of Diwali as the "victory of good over evil", refers to the light of higher knowledge dispelling all ignorance, the ignorance that masks one's true nature, not as the body, but as the unchanging, infinite, immanent and transcendent reality. With this awakening comes compassion and the awareness of the oneness of all things (higher knowledge). This brings *anand* (joy or peace). Just as we celebrate the birth of our physical being, Diwali is the celebration of this Inner Light.

While the story behind Diwali and the manner of celebration varies from region to region (festive fireworks, worship, lights, sharing of sweets), the essence is the same – to rejoice in the Inner Light (Atman) or the underlying Reality of all things (Brahman).

Significance in other religions

Diwali, the Festival of Light, comes at the end of October or early November. It's a festival that Sikhs, Hindus and Jains celebrate.

Jainism

Diwali has a very special significance in Jainism. It is celebrated as Deva Devali around the full moon day (Purnima) of Kartik. Lord Mahavira, the last of the Jain Tirthankar of this era, attained Nirvana or Moksh on this day at Pavapuri on Oct. 15, 527 BC, on Chaturdashi of Kartika, as Tilyapannatti of Yativrashaba from the sixth century states:

Mahavira, the 24th Tirthankara of this era, revitalised Jainism Dharma followed by Jains even today. Though few outdated history books still mention that he established Jainism. According to tradition, the chief disciple of Mahavira, Ganadhara Gautam Swami also attained complete knowledge (Kevalgyana) on this day, thus making Diwali one of the most important Jain festivals.

Mahavira attained his nirvana at the dawn of the amavasya (new moon). According to the Kalpasutra by Acharya Bhadrabahu, 3rd century BC, many gods were present there, illuminating the darkness.[18] The following night was pitch black without the light of the gods or the moon. To symbolically keep the light of their master's knowledge alive:

> 16 Gana-kings, 9 Malla and 9 Lichchhavi, of Kasi and Kosal, illuminated their doors. They said: "Since the light of knowledge is gone, we will make light of ordinary matter" ("गय॑ स॑ भवुज्जोय॑, दव्वुज्जोय॑ करिसिसमो").

Replica of Pava temple at Pansara. Mahavira attained Nirvana at Pava.

Dipavali was mentioned in Jain books as the date of the nirvana of Mahavira. In fact, the oldest reference to Diwali is a related word, dipalikaya, which occurs in Harivamsha-Purana, written by Acharya Jinasena[19] and composed in the Shaka Samvat era in the year 705.

> ततस्तु: लोक: प्रतिवरषमादरत् परसिद्धदीपल्कियातर् भारत॑ ।
> समुदयत: पूजयितु॑ जनि॑वर॑ जनि॑नदर-नरिवाण वभिूति-भकतिभाक्।२०।
> tatastuh lokah prativarsham-araat ako
> prasiddha-deepalikaya-aatra bharate
> samudyatah poojayitum jineshvaram
> jinendra-nirvana vibhuti-bhaktibhak
>
> Translation: The gods illuminated Pavanagari by lamps to mark the occasion. Since that time, the people of Bharat celebrate the famous festival of "Dipalika" to worship the Jinendra (i.e. Lord Mahavira) on the occasion of his nirvana.

Dipalikaya roughly translates as "light leaving the body". Dipalika, which can be roughly translated as "splendiferous light of lamps", is used interchangeably with the word "Diwali".

Vira Nirvana Samvat: The Jain year starts with Pratipada following Diwali. Vira Nirvana Samvat 2534 starts with Diwali 2007. The Jain business people traditionally started their accounting year from Diwali. The relationship between the Vir and Shaka era is given in Titthogali Painnaya and Dhavalaa by Acharya Virasena:

पंचयमासा पंचयवास छुच्चेव होंनतिवाससया।
परणिविवुअस्स अरहिंतिो तो उपपन्नो सगो राया॥

Thus the Nirvana occurred 605 years and 5 months before the Saka era.

On 21 October 1974 the 2500th Nirvana Mahotsava was celebrated by the Jains throughout India.[4]

Sikhism

For Sikhs, Diwali is particularly important which they celebrate after the celebration of Bandi Chhorh Divas (the Day of Freedom), celebrating the release from prison of the Sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind Ji, and 52 other princes with him, in October 1619.

The Sikh struggle against the Mughal Empire's atrocities against non-Muslims, especially on Sikhs, which intensified in the 18th century, came to be centered around this day. After the execution of Banda Bahadur in 1716, who had led the agrarian uprising in Punjab, the Sikhs started the tradition of deciding matters concerning the community at the biennial meetings which took place at Amritsar on the first of Baisakh and at Diwali. These assemblies were known as the Sarbat Khalsa and a resolution passed by it became a gurmata (decree of the Guru).

Diwali is celebrated by Sikhs because Guru Hargobind returned to Amritsar after his imprisonment at Gwalior where he also won the freedom of 52 innocent Princes who had long been imprisoned at Gwalior for political reasons.

From Bhai Gurdas narration we come to know the whole story. Guru Hargobind, the sixth Guru, had been arrested for political reasons. The Mughal Emperor now decided that the religious fundamentalists that had been behind the martyrdom of the fifth Guru, Guru Arjun, were a greater threat to his throne.The Sikh tradition holds that the Emperor Jahangir had imprisoned Guru Hargobind Ji and 52 princes. The Emperor was asked to release Guru Hargobind Ji which he agreed to do. However, the Guru asked that the princes be released also. The Emperor agreed, but said only those who could hold onto his cloak tail would be allowed to leave the prison. This was in order to limit the number of prisoners who could leave. However, Guru Hargobind Ji had a cloak made with 52 pieces of string and so each prince was able to hold onto one string and leave prison.And thus the Kings/rajahs were freed and the Guru became known popularly as the "Bandi Chhor" (Deliverer from prison). He arrived at Amritsar on the Diwali day and the HarMandar (also known as the "Golden Temple") was lit with hundreds of lamps to celebrate his return and hence the day came to be known as the "Bandi Chhor Divas" (the day of freedom). Sikhs celebrated the return of their Guru by lighting the Sri Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple) and this tradition continues today. [20]

An important Sikh event associated with Diwali is the martyrdom of the elderly Sikh scholar and strategist Bhai Mani Singh in 1737. Bhai Mani Singh was the Granthi (keeper/reader of Sikh scripture) of Harmandir Sahib (popularly known as the Golden Temple). He transcribed the final version of Guru Granth Sahib dictated to him by Guru Gobind Singh in 1704.

Bhai Mani Singh assumed charge of Harmandir Sahib's management in 1708. In 1737, he received permission from Zakariya Khan, the then Mughal governor of Punjab, to hold a religious gathering of the Khalsa for celebrating Bandi Chhorh Diwas on the auspicious day of Diwali for a large tax of 5000 Rupees. He expected to put together the required sum from contribution made by the Sikhs who would assemble that day. But on discovered Zakariya Khan's plot to kill the Sikhs during the gathering, he sent out messages warning them not to turn up for the meeting. As a result the tax could not be paid and Zakariya Khan ordered Bhai Mani Singh's execution at Lahore.

Ever since the Bandi Chhorh Diwas celebrated during Diwali is also commemorated the martyrdom of Bhai Mani Singh. It is also believed that this event along with other Sikh martyrdoms gave further momentum to the Khalsa struggle for freedom and eventual success in establishing the Khalsa rule in the north of Delhi.

In addition to Nagar keertan (a street procession) and an Akhand paath (a continuous reading of Guru Granth Sahib), Diwali is celebrated by an awesome fireworks display. The Golden Temple as well as the whole complex is festooned with thousands of shimmering lights, creating a unique jewelbox effect.

The festival of Diwali became the second most important day after the Baisakhi, when Khalsa was formally established by the Tenth Guru Gobind Singh in 1699.

Buddhism

While not a large occasion for the Buddhist community, Newar Buddhists celebrate Diwali through the chanting of mantras and remembering Emperor Ashoka who is said to have converted to Buddhism on this day, and therefore Buddhists also know the festival as Ashok Vijayadashami. Their temples and monasteries are well decorated during this time and the Buddha is worshipped with full honours.[21][22][23]

Although Diwali is not considered a major holiday in East Asia or in most the Mahayana schools of East Asian Buddhism, the lunar calendar birthday of Bhaisajyaguru Buddha (whose healing aspect is often in the form of burning lights) is commemorated during Diwali.

Regional variations within India

The celebrations vary in different regions:[24][25]

Gujarat

In Gujarat the Diwali celebrations take on a number of distinct characteristics.[26]

Diwali occurs in the second (dark) lunar fortnight (*Krishna Paksha*) of the month of Ashvin (Gujarati: "Aaso") and the first (bright) fortnight (*Shukla Paksha*) of Kartika (Guj: "Kartik"). Aaso is the last month of the Gujarati calendar, and Kartik the first.

Celebrations start earlier in Gujarat than in the rest of India, commencing on *Aygaras*, the 11th day of the *Krishna Paksha* of Aaso. On the 12th day is *Vagh Baras*, the festival of the cow and the calf. On the 13th day is *Dhanteras*, the days Diwali starts in the rest of India. The 14th (elsewhere known as *Naraka Chaturdashi* in South India and *Choti Diwali* in the North) is celebrated as *Kali Choudas*. The 15th (new moon day) is *Lakshmi Puja*, celebrated throughout India. The next day, the first day of *Shukla Paksha* of Kartik, is *Bestu Varsh*, new years day, start of the Gujarati calendar. The 2nd day of Kartik is *Bhai Bij*, the day Diwali ends.

A further celebration takes place on the 5th day of Kartik, *Labh Pancham*.

Gujarat is also the location of the Jain festival of *Deva Devali*, two weeks later, around the full moon day of Kartik. This takes place at the sacred mountains of Girnar and Palitana, in south Gujarat.

Tamil Nadu

In Tamil Nadu it is celebrated as **Deepavali**. They celebrate this by taking a sesame oil bath in the early morning to commemorate the victory of Sri Krishna over Narakasura; lighting lamps, deepams, bursting fireworks, wearing new clothes and sharing sweets. A traditional visit to the Temple is a significant ritual of the day.

- The city Sivakasi in Tamil Nadu is the capital of India's firework industry with about 8,000 factories, producing 90 percent of the country's total fireworks output. It also has the world's largest fireworks manufacturing unit.

Sivakasi fireworks on display.

The entire house is cleaned and new clothes are purchased for the entire family which is followed by lighting of oil lamps around the house and bursting firecrackers.

A chakra firework

Karnataka

It is celebrated as Deepavali (deepa + aavaLi ==> light + abundance) in Karnataka. It is celebrated on the before and next day of amavasya (No moon day) as naraka chaturdashi (before no-moon day) resembling Satyabhama's victory over narakasura and as balipadyami the first day of kaarthika masa; inviting the greatest emperor of times Balichakravarthi to each and everybody's homes. The entire house is cleaned and new clothes are purchased for the entire family which is followed by lighting of oil lamps around the house and bursting firecrackers. The tradition in kannada families is that all members gather together for the three days celebration. First day they'll start with bursting crackers, followed by lakshmi mahaapooje on amavaasye (no-moon day) and then on third day decorating the whole house and especially entrance with flowers and floor decoration to invite bali to their homes; a special fort-entrance kind of thing is made on the entrances of every home which is made out of cow-dung(gOmaya) and sandalwood(siri-chandana) which both have a high divine reverence in kannada

tradition. Also fire-camps are kindled on both naraka chaturdashi and balipadyami days of deepavali; where in respective community people's gathering is significant and huge firework bursting ceremony happens. Later the whole karthika maasa (till next no-moon day) is celebrated by praying kunti idol in every house; this signifies that kunti; the mother of great pandavas has come to mother's (tavaru mane in kannada) home for karthika maasa. In villages on the third day balipadyami also known for gOvpooje (reverence to cows) all the cattle in the home are decorated gorgeously and are prayed for good will of next coming year. also gO melas happen the same day. The celebration of Diwali is marked by the lighting of innumerable lamps in every courtyard and the bursting of crackers. Sweetmeals, new clothes and spirit is there as in other festivals. The time for rejoicing is mainly early morning and late night. These hours of darkness bordering the waking hours are preferred as lights and crackers are the highlights of the festivities and these need darkness to have their illuminating effect. Hence people rise early and go late to sleep.

Kerala

Deepavali falls on the preceding day of the New Moon in the Malayalam month Thulam (October-November). The celebrations are based on the legend of *Narakasura Vadha* - where Sri Krishna destroyed the demon and the day Narakasura died is celebrated as Deepavali.[27] It commemorates the triumph of good over evil. It's celebrated with more enthusiasm in the southern parts of Kerala compared with northern Kerala. Firecrackers are burst and Ottamthullal performances are hosted. Exchanges of gifts and dresses are usually held. Especially on the 4th day of celebration, the ladies are invited to their father's house on the 4th day after the 'Deepavali' and given dress and money as gifts.[28].The entire family buy new clothes, sweets and many other decorative items to decorate their home. Firecrackers are a major item found in all houses especially during diwalis. Children along with their friends and cousins have a lot of enjoyment and enthusiasm. Humongous amounts of sweets are made, some of the sweets are jelebi,,laddoo, unniappam, paalappam etc. are made at every house.They decorate their homes with diyas (or deepams) and light many fire crackers especially a stick-like cracker called as Kambithiri in Malayalam. All families decorate their homes with rangolis or flower designs.They hold a special pooja in which newly painted idols of gods are prayed to.

Andhra Pradesh

In Andhra Pradesh, the festivities start out at the crack of dawn and carry on well into the night. Most people make a trip to the local temple along with their families to seek the blessings of their respective Gods. The night sky is lit up with a scintillating array of noisy fireworks.

Diwali is one of the seven most important festivals of Andhra Pradesh. It is very popular with children who celebrate Diwali because of the excitement of bursting firecrackers. Special shops to sell firecrackers are set up in all towns, cities and bigger villages. There are some traditional customs followed such as buying new clothes for this festival. Buying new home or vehicles is considered auspicious. Special sweets are made too. Some eateries in Hyderabad make some delicious sweets during Diwali which will not be available at any other time. Meat and alcohol are generally not consumed. Tradition has it that Andhraites gift sweets during Diwali. Some areas host local stage story telling called Hari Katha. Some areas may put a huge Narakasura dummy made with firecrackers. This will be burst by a person dressed as Lord Krishna or, more accurately, a costume of Satyabhama, the consort of Lord Krishna, who actually killed the demon Narakasura; an event that is celebrated as Diwali for generations. The evening sky of Diwali is a colourful sight to watch.

People clean/white-wash or paint/decorate their homes as it is a very auspicious day; to welcome the goddess of wealth and prosperity i.e. Lakshmi devi to their homes. Homes are lit up with hundreds of diyas and colourful Diwali Rangolis (link) adorn the doorways. After all this preparation all the members of the family perform the Lakshmi pooja. Another custom involves decorating homes with paper figures.

Festivities cut across boundaries to move on from the small villages to the big towns, often beginning almost a month before Diwali. Sales of expensive silk saris, jewellery, ornaments, and household goods increase. From the poor to the rich, everyone indulges in the largest shopping spree of the year. Sweets, which are an integral part of any festival in Andhra Pradesh, are prepared or purchased from shops. The festival is full of messages depicting one or more aspects of human life, relationships, and ancient traditions.

Maharashtra

In Maharashtra, Diwali starts from *Vasubaras* which is the 12th day of the 2nd half of the Marathi month *Ashvin*. This day is celebrated by performing an *Aarti* of the cow and its calf - which is a symbol of love between mother and her baby.

The next day is *Dhana Trayodashi*. This day is of special importance for traders and business people. It is also considered an auspicious day for making important purchases, especially metals, including kitchenware and precious metals like silver and gold.

This is followed by *Naraka Chaturdashi*. On this day people get up early in the morning and take their bath before sunrise while stars are still visible. Bathing is an elaborate process on this day with abundant use of 'ubtans', oils and perfumes, and is preceded by an Aarti performed on the person by some lady, usually mother or wife. The whole process is referred to as 'abhyanga-snaan'.

Then comes *Lakshmi- pooja*. It occurs on *Amavasya* i.e. no moon day. The dark night is illuminated by lamps and at dusk firecrackers are burst. New account books are opened after a *pooja*. Generally the traders do not make any payments on that day (according to their belief *Lakshmi* should not be given away but must come home). In every household, cash, jewellery and an idol of the goddess Lakshmi is worshipped. Friends, neighbours and relatives are invited over and celebrations are in full swing. The broom used to clean one's house is also worshipped as a symbol of Lakshmi in some places .

Padwa is the 1st day of the new month – *Kartik* in the Hindu calendar. It marks the start of Hindu financial year. Its a special day for Husband and wife. The wife puts tilak on her husbands forehead and gets an expensive gift. In recent times there is a growing trend of organising a cultural event called 'Diwali Padwa' early in the morning.

Bhaubeej – it is the time when the bond of love between a brother and sister is further strengthened as the sister asks God for her brother/s' long and successful life while she receives presents from her beloved brothers.

Orissa

Deepavali is celebrated with great joy. Rows of oil lamps, candles adorn the thresholds of all houses. Firecrackers are burst, sweetmeals are relished and distributed. Some people also worship family goddess. Tarpanam is done in the morning of deepavali. All the members of the household gather together just after dusk. A rangoli(Muruja) of a sailboat is made on the ground. The boat has seven chambers in north,ten chamber in east,and twelve chamber in south.the east chamber are meant for gods.north chamber for seer or Rishi and south chambers for manes and forefathers. Over the drawing of each different chamber several items are kept - cotton, mustard, salt, asparagus root, turmeric,sweets,cakes and a wild creeper. Over the central chamber are the offerings meant for [prasad]. Perched over the prasad is a jute stem with a cloth wick tied around the edge. It is lit at the beginning of the puja. All members of the family hold a bundle of jute stems in their hands, Lighting their respective bundles from the flame on the rangoli, they raise them skywards fo their forefathers chanting: Badabadua ho andhaara e asa Aluaa e Jaao Baaisi pahacha e Gadagadau thaao (meaning-oh our ancestors,seers and gods you came on the dark night of Mahalaya,and now it is time for you to depart for heaven,so we are showing light,may you attain peace in abode of Jagannatha)

Beside the rangoli, a mortar and pestle and a plough are also kept and worshiped. After the puja and offerings, the family celebrates Diwali festival by bursting firecrackers. As in other regions, most people prefer to celebrate it in their own homes, though family gatherings are also common. For Diwali houses are brightly lit, with the doors and windows kept open as Lakshmi is supposed to visit every home, and you can't afford to leave it dark and abandoned. Various kinds of Pithas are prepared and given to the deities and forefathers, and enjoyed with family and friends. The ritual of Kali Puja is a famous affair in puri, Bhadrak, Rourkela, Cuttack &Jajpur area.[29]

Mithilanchal, West Bengal & Assam

Kali Puja is light-up night for Mithila region in Bihar, West Bengal & Assam, corresponding to the festival of Diwali (pronounced *Dipaboli* in Bengali), (in Maithili, it is known as Diya-Baati) where people light diyas/candles in memory of the souls of departed ancestors. The goddess Kali is worshipped for whole night on one night during this festival. This is also a night of fireworks, with local youth burning sparklers and firecrackers throughout the night. Both the traditions of worshiping the Goddess Kali as well as Goddess Lakshmi and Lord Ganesha is prevalent in the Mithila region. Kali puja is also known by the names of **Shyama puja** or **Nisha puja** in the Mithila region.

Kali Puja in Kolkata and Assam.

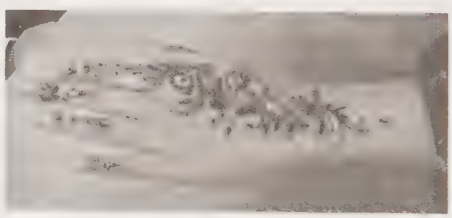
Goa and Konkan

Diwali begins in Konkan and Goa on the day of Naraka Chaturdashi.
The houses are cleaned and decorated with Kandil, lamps, mango leaves, and marigold flowers. The utensils are made to shine, filled with water, and decorated for the holy bath the following morning. On this day, paper-made effigies of Narakasura, filled with grass and firecrackers symbolising evil, are made.[30] These effigies are burnt at around four o'clock in the morning the following day/ Firecrackers are burst, and people return home to take a scented oil bath. Lamps are lit in a lineThe women of the house perform aarti of the men, gifts are exchanged.a bitter berry called as *kareet* is crushed under the feet in token of killing Narkasur, symbolising evil and removal of ignorance. Different varieties of Poha and sweets are made and eaten with family and friends. Festivities continue till Tulsi Vivah and lamps are lit every evening. Celebrations include Lakshmi puja on the Diwali day, Krishna puja or Govardhan puja and cattle worship on Balipratipada day, Bhaubeej, and Tulsi vivah.

Melas

To add to the festival of Diwali, fairs (or 'melas') are held throughout India.[31] Melas are to be found in many towns and villages. A mela generally becomes a market day in the countryside when farmers buy and sell produce. Girls and women dress attractively during the festival. They wear colourful clothing and new jewellery, and their hands are decorated with henna designs.

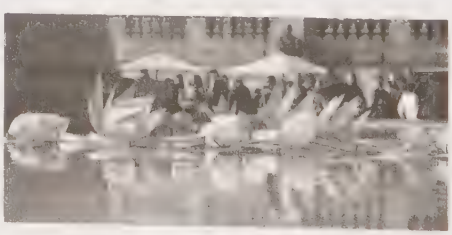
Among the many activities that take place at a mela are performances by jugglers, acrobats, snake charmers and fortune tellers. Food stalls are set up, selling sweet and spicy foods. There are a variety of rides at the fair, which include Ferris wheels and rides on animals such as elephants and camels. Activities for children, such as puppet shows, occur throughout the day.



Mehndi is applied on women's hands at a Diwali Mela.

In other parts of the world

Diwali is celebrated in various parts of the world, particularly those with large populations of Hindu and Sikh origin. These include countries such as Sri Lanka, Myanmar,[32] Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Mauritius, Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, Guyana, Surinam, Trinidad and Tobago,(Zimbabwe) the Netherlands, Canada, the United Kingdom,[32] and the United States. With more and more Indians now migrating to various parts of the world, the number of countries where Diwali / Deepavali is celebrated has been gradually increasing. While in some countries it is celebrated mainly by Indian expatriates, in others it has become part of the general local culture. In most of these countries Diwali is celebrated on the same lines as described in this article with some minor variations. Some important variations are worth mentioning.



Diwali lanterns at Trafalgar Square in London

In Nepal, Diwali is known as "Tihar" or "Swanti". It is celebrated during the October/November period. Here the festival is celebrated for five days and the traditions vary from those followed in India. On the first day (Kaag tihar), crows are given offerings, considering them to be divine messengers. On the second day (Kukur tihar), dogs are given food for their honesty. On the third day, Laxmi puja is performed. This is the last day according to Nepal Sambat, so many of the businessmen clear their accounts on this day and on finishing it, worship goddess Laxmi, the goddess of wealth. The fourth day is celebrated as new year. Cultural processions and other celebrations are observed in this day. The Newars celebrate it as "Maha Puja", a special ritual in which the body is worshipped to keep it fit and healthy for the year ahead on this day. On the fifth and final day called "Bhai Tika", brothers and sisters meet and exchange gifts.

In Nepal, family gathering is more significant during Diwali. People in the community play "Deusi and Bhailo" which is a kind of singing and dancing forming a group. People go to all the houses in the community and play songs and dance, and give blessing to the visited house, whereas the home owner gives some food like rice grains, Roti, fruits and money. After the festival, people donate some part of collected money and food to the charity or welfare groups and rest of the money and food, they go for picnic. People also play swing called Dore Ping made out of thick ropes and Pirke Ping or Rangate Ping made out of woods.

The Divali Nagar or "Diwali capital" in Chaguanas, Trinidad and Tobago

In Sri Lanka, this festival is also called "Deepavali" and is celebrated by the Tamil community. On this day, it is traditional for people to take an oil bath in the morning, wear new clothes, exchange gifts, performing Poosai(Pūjā), and a visit to the Koil(Hindu Temple) is normal.[33] Burning of firecrackers in the evening of the festival is a common practice of this festival. Hindus light oil lamps to invite the blessings of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and to banish any evil from the household for once and for all.[34] The festival is marked by illumination, making of toys of enamel and making of figures out of crystal sugar popularly known as Misiri. Srilanka's celebration include many of the traditional aspects of Deepavali such as games, fireworks, singing and dancing, however the tradition of a large meal and fireworks are admirably preserved.

Diwali celebrations in Coventry, United Kingdom.

In Malaysia, Diwali festival is celebrated during the seventh month of the Hindu solar calendar. It is a federal public holiday throughout Malaysia. In many respects it resembles the traditions followed in the Indian subcontinent. 'Open houses' are held where Hindu Malaysians (Of all ethnic races like Tamils,Telugus and Malayalees) welcome fellow Malaysians of different races and religions to their house for a scrumptious meal. This is a practice unique to Malaysia and shows the goodwill and friendly ties practiced by all Malaysians during any festive occasion.

In Singapore, Diwali festival is a gazetted public holiday. Observed primarily by the minority Indian community (Tamils), it is typically marked by a light-up in the Little India district, the heart of the Indian community. Apart from the light-up, other activities such as bazaars, exhibitions, parades and concerts will also take place in Little India. The Hindu Endowment Board of Singapore along with Singapores' government organizes many of these cultural events during this festive period.

In Trinidad and Tobago, communities all over the islands get together and celebrate the festival. One major celebration that stands out is the Diwali Nagar, or Village of the Festival of Lights. It features stage performances by the east Indian cultural practitioners, a folk theatre featuring skits and plays, an exhibition on some aspect of Hinduism, displays by various Hindu religious sects and social organizations, nightly worship of Lakshmi, lighting of deeyas, performances by various schools related to Indian culture, and a food court with Indian and non-Indian vegetarian delicacies. The festival culminates with magnificent fireworks displays ushering in Diwali. Thousands of people participate in an atmosphere devoid of alcohol and in a true family environment.

In Britain, Hindus celebrate Diwali with great enthusiasm. People clean and decorate their homes with lamps and candles. A popular type of candle is a *diya*. People also give each other sweets such as laddoo and barfi, and the different communities may gather for a religious ceremony and get-together. It is also an important time to contact

family in India and perhaps exchange gifts. Diwali is becoming well known in Britain and some non-Indians join in. Leicester plays hosts to some of the biggest celebrations outside of India.[35] Diwali also coincides with British Bonfire Night traditions on November the 5th. In the East End of London, a kind of joint festival has evolved where everyone enjoys the same fire and fireworks for their own diverse reasons.

In the United States, with increasing Indian population, Diwali is assuming significant importance year after year. Diwali was first celebrated in the White House in 2003 and was given official status by the United States Congress in 2007. Barack Obama became the first president to personally attend Diwali at the White House in 2009. On the eve of his first visit to India as the President of United States, Obama released an official statement sharing best wishes with "Hindus" for Diwali.[36] Indians in the US celebrate Diwali in different parts of the US, just as in India. The Diwali Mela in Cowboys Stadium boasted an attendance of 100,000 people in 2009. In 2009, San Antonio became the first U.S. city to sponsor an official Diwali celebration including a fireworks display and 5000 people in attendance. In 2011, The Pierre in New York City, now operated by Tata Group's Taj Hotels, hosted its first Diwali celebration.[37]

In Australia, Diwali is celebrated publicly among the people of Indian origin and the local Australians in Melbourne. On 21 July 2002 an organisation "The Australian Indian Innovations Incorporated" (AIII) consisting of a conglomerate of independent organisations and individuals was formed to celebrate Indian Festivals In Melbourne. AIII facilitated opportunities to depict the cultural kaleidoscope of India and assist Indians in Melbourne to showcase Indian art, culture, style, traditions and food via various activities, seminars, festivals, fairs and events. The first Inaugural Diwali Festival-2002", was held at Sandown Race Course on Sunday 13 October 2002. Since then until October 2008, about 140000 people visited this Australian Indian Cultural Extravaganza filled with culture, fun and cuisine. This 10 Hour Festival is depicting India through 50 Stalls, 10 Food stalls and an 8 hour cultural programme with DJ, Children's rides and spectacular fire works over the last 7 years.

Other place where Diwali is celebrated in Melbourne is Sri Shiva Vishnu Temple, Carrum Downs. Food stalls are present and children fun rides. Later on in the evening a spectacular fireworks show is displayed.

In New Zealand, Diwali is celebrated publicly among many of the South Asian diaspora cultural groups. There are main public festivals in Auckland and Wellington, with other events around the country becoming more popular and visible. An official reception has been held at the New Zealand Parliament since 2003.[38] Diwali is celebrated by Hindus. The festival signifies the triumph of light over darkness, justice over injustice, good over evil and intelligence over ignorance. Lakshmi Mata is worshipped at this festival. Lakshmi Mata is the goddess of light, wealth and beauty. Special Divali foods are barfi and Prasad.

Notes

[1] The name of the festival in various regional languages include:
Sanskrit: दीपावली, *Dīpāvalī*[?], Tamil: தீபாவளி, *Tīpāvaḷi*[?], Nepali: दीपावली, तिहार, *Dīpāvalī, Tihāra*[?], Hindi: दिवाली, *Divālī*[?], Gujarati: , *Divālī*[?], Marathi: दिवाळी, *Divāḷī*[?], Kannada: , *Dīpāvaḷi*[?], Konkani: धाकली दिवाळी, *Dhākalī Divāḷī*[?], Malayalam: ദീപാവലി, *Dīpāvali*[?], Oriya: , *Dīpābaḷī*[?], Punjabi: ਦਿਵਾਲੀ, *Divālī*[?], Telugu: , *Dīpāvaḷi*[?], Urdu: دیوالی, *Dywalyٔ*[?]

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[8] Monier Monier-Williams. *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. Entry for दीप. p. 481.

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[12] Valerie Petrillo. *Asian American History* (http://books.google.com/books?id=GErOyV7FBNUC&pg=PA175&dq=lamps+diwali+evil+spirits&hl=en&ei=l2ioTsinEYigtwe5u9EO&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=2&ved=0CFIQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=lamps diwali evil spirits&f=false). Chicago Review Press. . Retrieved 26 October 2011. "There are firecrackers everywhere to scare off evil spirits and contribute to the festive atmosphere."

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[38] "Diwali Downunder: Transforming and Performing Indian Tradition in Aotearoa/New Zealand" (http://www.nzetc.org/tm/scholarly/tei-Sch091JMS-t1-g1-t5.html). *New Zealand Journal of Media Studies* **9** (1): 25–35. 2005. ISSN 1173 0811. .

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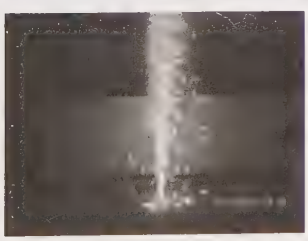
External links

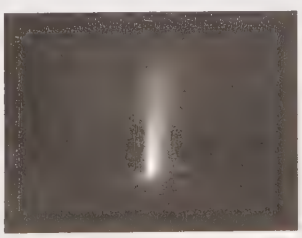
- Diwali (http://www.dmoz.org/Society/Holidays/Diwali/) at the Open Directory Project

Gallery



Deepavali Firework fountain

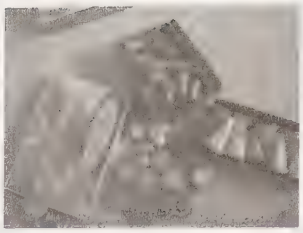
Deepavali Firework Circle in swing



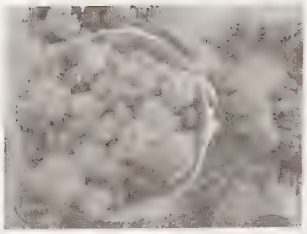
Fire works at night

Dipavali Rangoli

Stalls selling Fire crackers

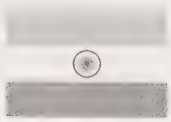


Dipavali Fire Crackers



Flower Garlands for Dipavali garnishing

India

Republic of India *Bhārat Gaṇarājya*	
 सत्यमेव जयते	
Motto: *"Satyameva Jayate"* (Sanskrit) सत्यमेव जयते (Devanāgarī) "Truth Alone Triumphs"[1]	
Anthem: *Jana Gana Mana* "Thou Art the Ruler of the Minds of All People"[2]	
National song:[3] ***Vande Mataram*** **"I Bow to Thee, Mother"**[1]	
 Area controlled by India is in dark green. Claimed but uncontrolled regions are in light green.	
Capital	New Delhi 28°36.8′N 77°12.5′E
Largest city	Mumbai
Official language(s)	
Recognised regional languages	
National languages	None defined by the Constitution[4]
Demonym	Indian
Government	Federal parliamentary constitutional republic[1]
- President	Pratibha Patil
- Prime Minister	Manmohan Singh (INC)

-	Speaker of the House	Meira Kumar (INC)
-	Chief Justice	S. H. Kapadia
Legislature		Parliament of India
-	Upper house	Rajya Sabha
-	Lower house	Lok Sabha
Independence		from the United Kingdom
-	Declared	15 August 1947
-	Republic	26 January 1950
Area		
-	Total	3,287,263 km^2 [5](7th) 1,269,219 sq mi
-	Water (%)	9.56
Population		
-	2011 census	1,210,193,422[6] (2nd)
-	Density	/km^2 (31st) /sq mi
GDP (PPP)		2011 estimate
-	Total	$4.469 trillion[7] (3rd)
-	Per capita	$3,703[7]
GDP (nominal)		2011 estimate
-	Total	$1.843 trillion[7] (10th)
-	Per capita	$1,527[7]
Gini (2004)		36.8[8] (79th)
HDI (2011)		▲ 0.547[9] ( ) (134th)
Currency		Indian rupee (₹) (INR)
Time zone		IST (UTC+05:30)
-	Summer (DST)	not observed (UTC+05:30)
Date formats		dd/mm/yyyy (AD)
Drives on the		left
ISO 3166 code		IN
Internet TLD		.in
Calling code		91

India ([1]/ˈɪndiə/), officially the **Republic of India** (, ***Bhārat Gaṇarājya***; see also the official names of India), is a country in South Asia. It is the seventh-largest country by geographical area, the second-most populous country with over 1.2 billion people, and the most populous democracy in the world. Bounded by the Indian Ocean on the south, the Arabian Sea on the south-west, and the Bay of Bengal on the south-east, it shares land borders with Pakistan to the west; China, Nepal, and Bhutan to the north-east; and Burma and Bangladesh to the east. In the Indian Ocean, India is in the vicinity of Sri Lanka and the Maldives; in addition, India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands share a maritime border with Thailand and Indonesia.

Home to the ancient Indus Valley Civilization and a region of historic trade routes and vast empires, the Indian subcontinent was identified with its commercial and cultural wealth for much of its long history.[10] Four of the world's major religions—Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism—originated here, whereas Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Islam arrived in the 1st millennium CE and also helped shape the region's diverse culture. Gradually annexed by and brought under the administration of the British East India Company from the early 18th century and administered directly by the United Kingdom from the mid-19th century, India became an independent nation in 1947 after a struggle for independence which was marked by non-violent resistance and led by Mahatma Gandhi.

The Indian economy is the world's ninth-largest economy by nominal GDP and fourth-largest economy by purchasing power parity (PPP). Following market-based economic reforms in 1991, India became one of the fastest-growing major economies; it is considered a newly industrialized country. However, it continues to face the challenges of poverty, illiteracy, corruption, and inadequate public health. A nuclear weapons state and a regional power, it has the third-largest standing army in the world and ranks tenth in military expenditure among nations. India is a federal constitutional republic governed under a parliamentary system consisting of 28 states and 7 union territories. It is one of the five BRICS nations. India is a pluralistic, multilingual, and multiethnic society. It is also home to a diversity of wildlife in a variety of protected habitats.

Etymology

The name *India* is derived from *Indus*, which is derived from the Old Persian word *Hindu*, from Sanskrit *Sindhu* (सिन्धु), the historic local appellation for the Indus River.[11] The ancient Greeks referred to the Indians as *Indoi* (Ἰνδοί), the people of the Indus.[12] The Constitution of India and usage in many Indian languages also recognises *Bharat* (pronounced Hindustani pronunciation: [ˈbʱaːrət̪] (listen)) as an official name of equal status.[13] The name Bharat is derived from the name of the legendary king Bharata in Hindu scriptures. *Hindustan* (Hindustani pronunciation: [ɦɪnd̪ʊˈst̪aːn] (listen)), originally a Persian word for "Land of the Hindus" and referring to North India and Pakistan before 1947, is also occasionally used as a synonym for all of India.[14]

History

Ancient India

The earliest anatomically modern human remains found in South Asia are from approximately 30,000 years ago.[15] Nearly contemporaneous Mesolithic rock art sites have been found in many parts of the Indian subcontinent, including at the Bhimbetka rock shelters in Madhya Pradesh.[16] Around 7000 BCE, the first known neolithic settlements appeared on the subcontinent in Mehrgarh and other sites in western Pakistan.[17] These gradually developed into the Indus Valley Civilisation,[18] the first urban culture in South Asia,[19] which flourished during 2500–1900 BCE in Pakistan and western India.[20] Centred around cities such as Mohenjo-daro, Harappa, Dholavira, and Kalibangan, and relying on varied forms of subsistence, the civilisation engaged robustly in crafts production and wide-ranging trade.[19]

Paintings at the Ajanta Caves in Aurangabad, Maharashtra, sixth century.

During the period 2000–500 BCE, many regions of the subcontinent evolved from copper age to iron age cultures.[21] The Vedas, the oldest scriptures of Hinduism,[22] were composed during this period, and historians have analyzed these to posit a Vedic culture in the Punjab region and the upper Ganges Plain.[21] Most historians also consider this period to have encompassed several waves of Indo-Aryan migration into the subcontinent from the north-west.[22] The caste system, which created a hierarchy of priests, warriors, and free peasants, but which excluded indigenous peoples by labeling their occupations impure, arose during this period.[23] In the Deccan, archaeological evidence from this period suggests the existence of a chiefdom stage of political organisation.[21] In South India, the large number of megalithic monuments found from this period,[24] and nearby evidence of agriculture, irrigation tanks, and craft traditions suggest progression to sedentary life.[24]

By the fifth century BCE, the small chiefdoms of the Ganges Plain and the north-west regions had consolidated into 16 major oligarchies and monarchies called *Mahajanapadas*.[25][26] The emerging urbanisation as well as the orthodoxies of the late Vedic age created the religious reform movements of Buddhism and Jainism.[27] Buddhism, based on the teachings of India's first historical figure, Gautam Buddha, attracted followers from all social classes excepting the middle;[27][28] Jainism came into prominence around the same time during the life of its exemplar, Mahavira.[29] In an age of increasing urban wealth, both religions held up renunciation as an ideal,[30] and both established long-lasting monasteries.[25] Politically, by the 3rd century BCE, the kingdom of Magadha had annexed or reduced other states to emerge as the Mauryan Empire.[25] The empire was once thought to have controlled most of the subcontinent excepting the far south, but its core regions are now thought to have been separated by large autonomous areas.[31][32] The Maurya kings are known as much for their empire building and determined management of public life as for Ashoka the Great's renunciation of militarism and far-flung advocacy of the Buddhist *dhamma*.[33][34]

The Sangam literature of the Tamil language reveals that, between 200 BCE and 200 CE, the southern peninsula was being ruled by the Cheras, the Cholas, and the Pandyas, dynasties that traded extensively with the Roman

Empire and with West and South-East Asia.[35][36] In North India, Hinduism asserted patriarchal control within the family leading to increased subordination of women.[37][25] By the fourth and fifth centuries CE, the Gupta Empire had created a complex administrative and taxation system in the greater Ganges Plain that became a model for later Indian kingdoms.[38][39] Under the Guptas, a renewed Hinduism based on devotion rather than the management of ritual began to assert itself.[40] The renewal was reflected in a flowering of sculpture and architecture, which found patrons among an urban elite.[39] Classical Sanskrit literature flowered as well, and Indian science, astronomy, medicine, and mathematics made significant advances.[39]

Medieval India

The granite tower of Brihadeeswarar Temple in Thanjavur was completed in 1010 CE by Raja Raja Chola I.

The Indian early medieval age, 600 CE to 1200 CE, is defined by regional kingdoms and cultural diversity.[41] When Harsha of Kannauj, who ruled much of the Ganges plain from 606 to 647 CE, attempted to expand southwards, he was defeated by the Chalukya ruler of the Deccan.[42] When his successor attempted to expand eastwards, he was defeated by the Pala king of Bengal.[42] When the Chalukyas attempted to expand southwards, they were defeated by the Pallavas from farther south, who in turn were opposed by the Pandyas and the Cholas from still farther south.[42] No ruler of this period was able to create an empire and consistently control lands much beyond his core region.[41] During this time, pastoral peoples whose land had been cleared to make way for the growing agriculture economy were accommodated within caste society, as were new non-traditional ruling classes.[43] The caste system consequently began to show regional differences.[43]

In the sixth and seventh centuries CE, the first devotional hymns were created in the Tamil language.[44] They were imitated all over India and led to both the resurgence of Hinduism and the development of all modern languages of the subcontinent.[44] Indian royalty, big and small, and the temples they patronised, drew citizens in great numbers to the capital cities, which became economic hubs as well.[45] Temple towns of various sizes began to appear everywhere as India underwent another urbanisation.[45] By the eight and ninth centuries, the effects were felt in South-East Asia, as South Indian culture and political systems were exported to what today are Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia and Java.[46] Indian merchants, scholars, and sometimes armies were involved in this transmission; South-East Asians took the initiative as well with many sojourning in Indian seminaries and translating Buddhist and Hindu texts into their languages.[46]

After the tenth century, Muslim Central Asian nomadic clans, using swift-horse cavalry and raising vast armies united by ethnicity and religion, repeatedly overran South Asia's north-western plains, leading eventually to the establishment of the Islamic Delhi Sultanate in 1206.[47] The Sultanate was to control much of North India, and to make many forays into South India. Although at first disruptive for the Indian elites, the Sultanate largely left its vast non-Muslim subject population to its own laws and customs.[48][49] By repeatedly repulsing the Mongol raiders in the thirteenth century, the Sultanate saved India from the devastation visited on West and Central Asia, setting the scene for centuries of migration of fleeing soldiers, learned men, mystics, traders, artists, and artisans from that region into the subcontinent, thereby creating a syncretic Indo-Islamic culture in the north.[50][51] The Sultanate's raiding and weakening of the regional kingdoms of South India paved the way for the indigenous Vijayanagara Empire.[52] Embracing a strong Shaivite tradition and building upon the military technology of the Sultanate, the empire came to control much of peninsular India,[53] and was to influence South Indian society for long afterwards.[52]

Early modern India

Scribes and artists in the Mughal court, 1590–1595.

In the early sixteenth century, northern India, being then under mainly Muslim rulers,[54] fell again to the superior mobility and firepower of a new generation of Central Asian warriors.[55] The resulting Mughal Empire did not stamp out the local societies it came to rule, but rather balanced and pacified them through new administrative practices[56][57] and diverse and inclusive ruling elites,[58] leading to more systematic, centralised, and uniform rule.[59] Eschewing tribal bonds and Islamic identity, especially under Akbar, the Mughals united their far-flung realms through loyalty, expressed through a Persianised culture, to an emperor who had near divine status.[58] The Mughal state's economic policies, deriving most revenues from agriculture[60] and mandating that taxes be paid in the well-regulated silver currency,[61] caused peasants and artisans to enter larger markets.[59] The relative peace maintained by the empire during much of the seventeenth century was a factor in India's economic expansion,[59] resulting in greater patronage of painting, literary forms, textiles, and architecture.[62] Newly coherent social groups in northern and western India, such as the Marathas, the Rajputs, and the Sikhs, gained military and governing ambitions during Mughal rule, which, through collaboration or adversity, gave them both recognition and military experience.[63] Expanding commerce during Mughal rule gave rise to new Indian commercial and political elites along the coasts of southern and eastern India.[63] As the empire disintegrated, many among these elites were able to seek and control their own affairs.[64]

By the early 18th century, with the lines between commercial and political dominance being increasingly blurred, a number of European trading companies, including the English East India Company, had established outposts on the coast of India.[65][66] The East India Company's control of the seas, greater resources, and more advanced military training and technology led it to increasingly flex its military muscle and caused it to become attractive to a portion of the Indian elite; both these factors were crucial in allowing the Company to gain control over the Bengal region by 1765 and sideline the other European companies.[67][65][68][69] Its further access to the riches of Bengal and the subsequent increased strength and size of its army enabled it to annex or subdue most of India by the 1820s.[70] India was now no longer exporting manufactured goods as it long had, but was instead supplying the British empire with raw materials, and many historians consider this to be the onset of India's colonial period.[65] By this time, with its economic power severely curtailed by the British parliament and itself effectively made an arm of British administration, the Company began to more consciously enter non-economic arenas such as education, social reform, and culture.[71]

Modern India

Historians consider India's modern age to have begun sometime between 1848 and 1885. The appointment in 1848 of Lord Dalhousie as Governor General of the East India Company rule in India set the stage for changes essential to a modern state. These included the consolidation and demarcation of sovereignty, the surveillance of the population, and the education of citizens. Technological changes—among them, railways, canals, and the telegraph—were introduced not long after their introduction in Europe.[72][73][74][75] However, disaffection with the Company also grew during this time, and set off the Indian Rebellion of 1857. Fed by diverse resentments and perceptions, including invasive British-style social reforms, harsh land taxes, and summary treatment of some rich landowners and princes, the rebellion rocked many regions of northern and central India and shook the foundations of Company rule.[76][77] Although the rebellion was suppressed by 1858, it led to the dissolution of the East India Company and to the direct administration of India by the British government. Proclaiming a unitary state and a gradual but limited British-style parliamentary system, the new rulers also protected princes and landed gentry as a feudal safeguard against future unrest.[78][79] In the decades following, public life gradually emerged all over India, leading eventually to the founding of the Indian National Congress in 1885.[80][81][82][83]

The British Indian Empire, from the 1909 edition of *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*.

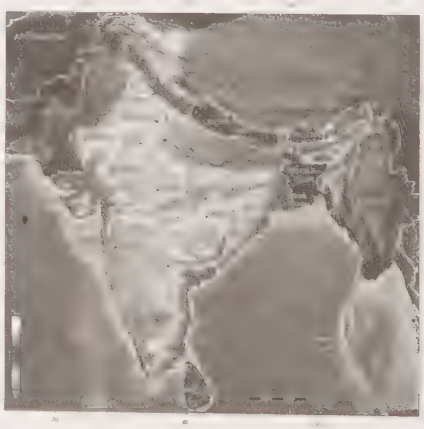
Jawaharlal Nehru became India's first prime minister in 1947. Mahatma Gandhi led the independence movement.

The rush of technology and the commercialisation of agriculture in the second half of the 19th century was marked by economic setbacks—many small farmers became dependent on the whims of far-away markets.[84] There was an increase in the number of large-scale famines,[85] and, despite the risks of infrastructure development borne by Indian taxpayers, little industrial employment was generated for Indians.[86] There were also salutary effects: commercial cropping, especially in the newly canalled Punjab, led to increased food production for internal consumption.[87] The railway network provided critical famine relief,[88] notably reduced the cost of moving goods,[88] and helped nascent Indian-owned industry.[87] After World War I, in which some one million Indians served,[89] a new period began. It was marked by British reforms but also repressive legislation, by more strident Indian calls for self-rule, and by the beginnings of a non-violent movement of non-cooperation, of which Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi would become the leader and enduring symbol.[90] During the 1930s, slow legislative reform was enacted by the British; the Indian National Congress won victories in the resulting elections.[91] The next decade was beset with crises: Indian participation in World War II, the Congress's final push for non-cooperation, and an upsurge of Muslim nationalism. All were capped by the independence of India in 1947, but tempered by the bloody partition of the subcontinent into two states.[92]

Vital to India's self-image as an independent nation was its constitution, completed in 1950, which put in place a sovereign, secular, and democratic republic.[93] In the 60 years since, India has had a mixed bag of successes and failures.[94] It has remained a democracy with civil liberties, an activist Supreme Court, and a largely independent press.[95] Economic liberalisation, which was begun in the 1990s, has created a large urban middle class, transformed India into one of the world's fastest-growing economies,[96] and increased its geopolitical clout. Indian movies, music, and spiritual teachings play an increasing role in global culture.[95] Yet, India has also been weighed down by seemingly unyielding poverty, both rural and urban;[95] by religious and caste-related violence;[97] by Maoist-inspired Naxalite insurgencies;[98] and by separatism in Jammu and Kashmir.[99] It has unresolved territorial disputes with China, which escalated into the Sino-Indian War of 1962;[100] and with Pakistan, which flared into wars fought in 1947, 1965, 1971, and 1999.[100] The India-Pakistan nuclear rivalry came to a head in 1998.[101] India's sustained democratic freedoms are unique among the world's new nations; however, in spite of its recent economic successes, freedom from want for its disadvantaged population remains a goal yet to be achieved.[102]

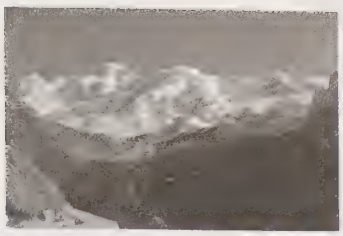
Geography

India comprises the bulk of the Indian subcontinent and lies atop the minor Indian tectonic plate, which in turn belongs to the Indo-Australian Plate.[103] India's defining geological processes commenced seventy five million years ago when the Indian subcontinent, then part of the southern supercontinent Gondwana, began a north-eastward drift across the then-unformed Indian Ocean that lasted fifty million years.[103] The subcontinent's subsequent collision with, and subduction under, the Eurasian Plate bore aloft the planet's highest mountains, the Himalayas. They abut India in the north and the north-east.[103] In the former seabed immediately south of the emerging Himalayas, plate movement created a vast trough that has gradually filled with river-borne sediment;[104] it now forms the Indo-Gangetic Plain.[105] To the west lies the Thar Desert, which is cut off by the Aravalli Range.[106]



Topographic map of India.

The original Indian plate survives as peninsular India, the oldest and geologically most stable part of India and extends as far north as the Satpura and Vindhya ranges in central India. These parallel ranges run from the Arabian Sea coast in Gujarat in the west to the coal-rich Chota Nagpur Plateau in Jharkhand in the east.[107] To the south the remaining peninsular landmass, the Deccan Plateau, is flanked on the west and east by the coastal ranges, the Western and Eastern Ghats respectively;[108] the plateau contains the nation's oldest rock formations, some over one billion years old. Constituted in such fashion, India lies to the north of the equator between 6° 44' and 35° 30' north latitude[109] and 68° 7' and 97° 25' east longitude.[110]



The Kedar Range of the Greater Himalayas rises behind Kedarnath Temple, one of the twelve Jyotirlinga shrines.

India's coast is 7517 kilometres (**unknown operator: u'strong'** mi) long; of this distance, 5423 kilometres (**unknown operator: u'strong'** mi) belong to peninsular India and 2094 kilometres (**unknown operator: u'strong'** mi) to the Andaman, Nicobar, and Lakshadweep Islands.[111] According to the Indian naval hydrographic charts, the mainland coast consists of the following: 43% sandy beaches, 11% rocky coast including cliffs, and 46% mudflats or marshy coast.[111]

Major Himalayan-origin rivers that substantially flow through India include the Ganges (Ganga) and the Brahmaputra, both of which drain into the Bay of Bengal.[112] Important tributaries of the Ganges include the Yamuna and the Kosi; the latter's extremely low gradient causes disastrous floods every year. Major peninsular rivers, whose steeper gradients prevent their waters from flooding, include the Godavari, the Mahanadi, the Kaveri, and the Krishna, which also drain into the Bay of Bengal;[113] and the Narmada and the Tapti, which drain into the Arabian Sea.[114] Among notable coastal features of India are the marshy Rann of Kutch in western India, and the alluvial Sundarbans delta, which India shares with Bangladesh.[115] India has two archipelagos: the Lakshadweep, coral atolls off India's south-western coast; and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, a volcanic chain in the Andaman Sea.[116]

The Indian climate is strongly influenced by the Himalayas and the Thar Desert, both of which drive the economically and culturally pivotal summer and winter monsoons.[117] The Himalayas prevent cold Central Asian katabatic winds from blowing in, keeping the bulk of the Indian subcontinent warmer than most locations at similar latitudes.[118][119] The Thar Desert plays a crucial role in attracting the moisture-laden south-west summer monsoon winds that, between June and October, provide the majority of India's rainfall.[117] Four major climatic groupings predominate in India: tropical wet, tropical dry, subtropical humid, and montane.[120]

Biodiversity

India lies within the Indomalaya ecozone and contains three biodiversity hotspots.[121] One of 17 megadiverse countries, it hosts 7.6% of all mammalian, 12.6% of all avian, 6.2% of all reptilian, 4.4% of all amphibian, 11.7% of all piscine, and 6.0% of all flowering plant species.[122] Endemism is high among plants, 33%, and among ecoregions such as the shola forests.[123] Habitat ranges from the tropical rainforest of the Andaman Islands, Western Ghats, and North-East India to the coniferous forest of the Himalaya. Between these extremes lie the moist deciduous sal forest of eastern India; the dry deciduous teak forest of central and southern India; and the babul-dominated thorn forest of the central Deccan and western Gangetic plain.[124] Under 12% of India's landmass bears thick jungle.[125] The medicinal neem, widely used in rural Indian herbal remedies, is a key Indian tree. The luxuriant pipal fig tree, shown on the seals of Mohenjo-daro, shaded Gautama Buddha as he sought enlightenment.

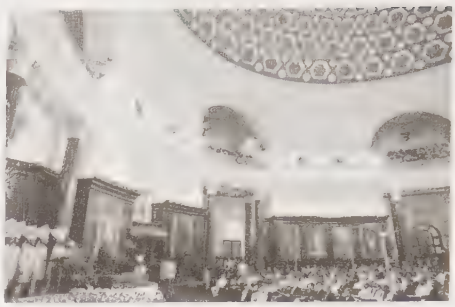
Shola highlands in Kudremukh National Park, part of the Western Ghats.

Many Indian species descend from taxa originating in Gondwana, from which the Indian plate separated long ago. Peninsular India's subsequent movement towards and collision with the Laurasian landmass set off a mass exchange of species. Epochal volcanism and climatic changes 20 million years ago forced a mass extinction.[126] Mammals then entered India from Asia through two zoogeographical passes flanking the rising Himalaya.[124] Thus, while 45.8% of reptiles and 55.8% of amphibians are endemic, only 12.6% of mammals and 4.5% of birds are.[122] Among them are the Nilgiri leaf monkey and Beddome's toad of the Western Ghats. India contains 172, or 2.9%, of IUCN-designated threatened species.[127] These include the Asiatic lion, the Bengal tiger, and the Indian white-rumped vulture, which, by ingesting the carrion of diclofenac-laced cattle, nearly went extinct.

The pervasive and ecologically devastating human encroachment of recent decades has critically endangered Indian wildlife. In response the system of national parks and protected areas, first established in 1935, was substantially expanded. In 1972, India enacted the Wildlife Protection Act[128] and Project Tiger to safeguard crucial wilderness; the Forest Conservation Act was enacted in 1980 and amendments added in 1988.[129] India hosts more than five hundred wildlife sanctuaries and thirteen biosphere reserves,[130] four of which are part of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves; twenty-five wetlands are registered under the Ramsar Convention.[131]

Politics

India is the world's most populous democracy.[132] A parliamentary republic with a multi-party system,[133] it has six recognised national parties, including the Indian National Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and more than 40 regional parties.[134] The Congress is considered centre-left or "liberal" in Indian political culture, and the BJP centre-right or "conservative". For most of the period between 1950—when India first became a republic—and the late 1980s, the Congress held a majority in the parliament. Since then, however, it has increasingly shared the political stage with the BJP,[135] as well as with powerful regional parties which have often forced the creation of multi-party coalitions at the Centre.[136]



Parliamentary joint session held in the Sansad Bhavan.

In the Republic of India's first three general elections, in 1951, 1957, and 1962, the Jawaharlal Nehru-led Congress won easy victories. On Nehru's death in 1964, Lal Bahadur Shastri briefly became prime minister; he was succeeded, after his own unexpected death in 1966, by Indira Gandhi, who went on to lead the Congress to election victories in 1967 and 1971. Following public discontent with the state of emergency she declared in 1975, the Congress was voted out of power in 1977; the just-created Janata Party, which had opposed the emergency, was voted in. Its government lasted just over three years. Voted back into power in 1980, the Congress saw a change in leadership in 1984, when Indira Gandhi was assassinated; she was succeeded by her son Rajiv Gandhi, who won an easy victory in the general elections later that year. The Congress was voted out again in 1989 when a National Front coalition, led by the newly formed Janata Dal in alliance with the Left Front, won the elections; that government too proved relatively short-lived: it lasted just under two years.[137] Elections were held again in 1991; no party won an absolute majority. But the Congress, as the largest single party, was able to form a minority government led by P.V. Narasimha Rao.[138]

The two years after the general election of 1996 were marked by political turmoil. Several short-lived alliances shared power at the Centre. The BJP formed a government briefly in 1996; it was followed by two comparatively long-lasting United Front coalitions, which depended on external support. In 1998, the BJP was able to form a successful coalition, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), which under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee, became the first non-Congress government to complete a full five-year term.[139] In the 2004 Indian general elections, again no party won an absolute majority, but the Congress emerged as the largest single party, forming a successful coalition: the United Progressive Alliance (UPA). It had the support of left-leaning parties and MPs opposed to the BJP. The UPA coalition was returned to power in the 2009 general election with increased numbers, and it no longer required external support from India's Communist parties.[140] That year, Manmohan Singh became the first prime minister since Jawaharlal Nehru in 1957 and 1962 to be re-elected to a second consecutive five-year term.[141]

Government

India is a federation with a parliamentary system governed under the Constitution of India, which serves as the country's supreme legal document. It is a constitutional republic and representative democracy, in which "majority rule is tempered by minority rights protected by law". Federalism in India defines the power distribution between the federal government and the states. The government abides by constitutional checks and balances. The Constitution of India, which came into effect on 26 January 1950,[142] states in its preamble that India is a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic.[143] India's form of government, traditionally described as "quasi-federal" with a strong centre and weak states,[144] has grown increasingly federal since the late 1990s as a result of political, economic, and social changes.[145][146]

Rashtrapati Bhavan, home of the President of India.

National symbols[1]

Flag	Tricolour
Emblem	Sarnath Lion Capital
Anthem	*Jana Gana Mana*
Song	*Vande Mataram*
Calendar	Saka
Game	Hockey
Flower	Lotus
Fruit	Mango
Tree	Banyan
Bird	Indian Peafowl
Land animal	Royal Bengal Tiger
Aquatic animal	River Dolphin
River	Ganges

The federal government comprises three branches:

- Executive: The President of India is the head of state[147] who is elected indirectly by a national electoral college[148] for a five-year term.[149] The Prime Minister of India is the head of government and exercises most executive power.[150] Appointed by the president,[151] the prime minister is by convention supported by the party or political alliance holding the majority of seats in the lower house of parliament.[150] The executive branch of the Indian government consists of the president, the vice-president, and the Council of Ministers—the cabinet being its executive committee—headed by the prime minister. Any minister holding a portfolio must be a member of one of the houses of parliament.[147] In the Indian parliamentary system, the executive is subordinate to the legislature; the prime minister and his council directly responsible to the lower house of the parliament.[152]
- Legislative: The legislature of India is the bicameral parliament. It operates under a Westminster-style parliamentary system and comprises the upper house called the Rajya Sabha ("Council of States") and the lower called the Lok Sabha ("House of the People").[153] The Rajya Sabha is a permanent body that has 245 members who serve in staggered six-year terms.[154] Most are elected indirectly by the state and territorial legislatures in numbers proportional to their state's share of the national population.[151] All but two of the Lok Sabha's 545 members are directly elected by popular vote; they represent individual constituencies via five-year terms.[155] The remaining two members are nominated by the president from among the Anglo-Indian community, in case the president decides that they are not adequately represented.[156]
- Judicial: India has a unitary three-tier judiciary, consisting of the Supreme Court, headed by the Chief Justice of India, 21 High Courts, and a large number of trial courts.[157] The Supreme Court has original jurisdiction over cases involving fundamental rights and over disputes between states and the Centre; it has appellate jurisdiction over the High Courts.[158] It is judicially independent[157] and has the power both to declare the law and to strike down union or state laws which contravene the constitution.[159] The Supreme Court is also the ultimate interpreter of the constitution.[160]

Subdivisions

India is a federation composed of 28 states and 7 union territories.[161] All states, as well as the union territories of Pondicherry and the National Capital Territory of Delhi, have elected legislatures and governments, both patterned on the Westminster model. The remaining five union territories are directly ruled by the Centre through appointed administrators. In 1956, under the States Reorganisation Act, states were reorganised on a linguistic basis.[162] Since then, their structure has remained largely unchanged. Each state or union territory is further divided into administrative districts. The districts in turn are further divided into tehsils and ultimately into villages.

States:

- Andhra Pradesh
- Arunachal Pradesh
- Assam
- Bihar
- Chhattisgarh
- Goa
- Gujarat
- Haryana
- Himachal Pradesh
- Jammu and Kashmir
- Jharkhand
- Karnataka
- Kerala
- Madhya Pradesh
- Maharashtra
- Manipur
- Meghalaya
- Mizoram
- Nagaland
- Orissa
- Punjab
- Rajasthan
- Sikkim
- Tamil Nadu
- Tripura
- Uttar Pradesh
- Uttarakhand
- West Bengal

Union territories:

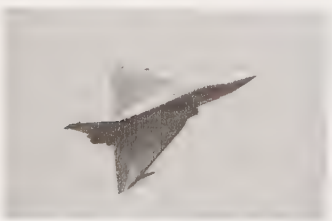
- Andaman and Nicobar Islands
- Chandigarh
- Dadra and Nagar Haveli
- Daman and Diu
- Lakshadweep
- National Capital Territory of Delhi
- Pondicherry

Foreign relations and military

Since its independence in 1947, India has maintained cordial relations with most nations. In the 1950s, it strongly supported decolonisation in Africa and Asia and played a lead role in the Non-Aligned Movement.[163] In the late 1980s, the Indian military twice intervened abroad at the invitation of neighbouring countries: a peace-keeping operation in Sri Lanka between 1987 and 1990; and an armed intervention to prevent a coup d'état attempt in Maldives. India has tense relations with neighbouring Pakistan; the two nations have gone to war four times: in 1947, 1965, 1971, and 1999. Three of these wars were fought over the disputed territory of Kashmir, while the fourth, the 1971 war, followed from India's support for the independence of Bangladesh.[164] After waging the 1962 Sino-Indian War and the 1965 war with Pakistan, India pursued close military and economic ties with the Soviet Union; by the late 1960s, the Soviet Union was its largest arms supplier.[165]

Manmohan Singh meets Dmitry Medvedev at the 34th G8 summit. India and Russia share extensive economic, defence, and technological ties.

Aside from ongoing strategic relations with Russia, India has wide-ranging defence relations with Israel and France. In recent years, it has played key roles in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation and the World Trade Organization. The nation has provided 100,000 military and police personnel to serve in 35 UN peacekeeping operations across four continents. It is an active participant in various multilateral forums, most notably the East Asia Summit and the G8+5.[166] In the economic sphere, India has close relationships with the developing nations of South America, Asia, and Africa. It pursues a "Look East" policy that seeks strengthened partnerships with the ASEAN nations, Japan, and South Korea revolving around many issues, but especially those involving economic investment and regional security.[167][168]



The HAL Tejas is a light supersonic fighter developed by the Aeronautical Development Agency and manufactured by Hindustan Aeronautics.[169]

China's nuclear test of 1964, as well as its repeated threats to intervene in support of Pakistan in the 1965 war, convinced India to develop nuclear weapons.[170] India conducted its first nuclear weapons test in 1974 and carried out further underground testing in 1998. Despite criticism and military sanctions, India has signed neither the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) nor the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, considering both to be flawed and discriminatory.[171] India maintains a "no first use" nuclear policy and is developing a nuclear triad capability as a part of its "minimum credible deterrence" doctrine.[172][173] It is also developing a ballistic missile defence shield and, in collaboration with Russia, a fifth generation fighter jet.[174] Other major indigenous military development projects include *Vikrant* class aircraft carriers and *Arihant* class nuclear submarines.[174]

Since the end of the Cold War, India has increased its economic, strategic, and military cooperation with the United States and the European Union.[175] In 2008, a civilian nuclear agreement was signed between India and the United States. Although India possessed nuclear weapons at the time and was not party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), it received waivers

from the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), ending earlier restrictions on India's nuclear technology and commerce. As a consequence, India has become the world's sixth *de facto* nuclear weapons state.[176] Following the NSG waiver, India was also able to sign civilian nuclear energy cooperation agreements with other nations, including Russia,[177] France,[178] the United Kingdom,[179] and Canada.[180]

The President of India is the supreme commander of the nation's armed forces. With 1.6 million active troops, the Indian military is the world's third-largest.[181] India's armed forces consists of an Army, Navy, Air Force, and auxiliary forces such as the Paramilitary Forces, the Coast Guard, and the Strategic Forces Command.[8] The official Indian defence budget for 2011 stands at US$36.03 billion, or 1.83% of GDP.[182] According to a 2008 SIPRI report, India's annual military expenditure in terms of purchasing power stood at US$72.7 billion,[183] In 2011, the annual defence budget increased by 11.6%,[184] although this does not include funds that goes to the military through other branches of government.[185] India has become the world's largest arms importer; in the period from 2006 to 2010, it accounted for 9% of all money spent on international arms purchases.[186] Much of the military expenditure is focused on defence against Pakistan and countering growing Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean.[184]

Economy

According to the International Monetary Fund, as of 2011, the Indian economy is worth US$1.631 trillion; it is the ninth-largest economy by market exchange rates, and is, at US$4.057 trillion, the fourth-largest by purchasing power parity, or PPP.[7] With its average annual GDP growth rate of 5.8% over the past two decades, and reaching 10.4% during 2010,[188] India is one of the world's fastest-growing economies.[189] However, the country ranks 138th in the world in nominal GDP per capita and 129th in GDP per capita at PPP.[7] Until 1991, all Indian governments followed protectionist policies that were influenced by socialist economics. Widespread state intervention and regulation largely walled the economy off from the outside world. An acute balance of payments crisis in 1991 forced the nation to liberalise its economy;[190] since then it has slowly moved towards a free-market system[191][192] by emphasizing both foreign trade and direct investment inflows.[193] India's recent economic model is largely capitalist.[192]

Indian agriculture dates from the period 7,000–6,000 BCE,[187] employs most of the national workforce, and is second in farm output worldwide.

The 467-million worker Indian labour force is the world's second-largest.[8] The service sector makes up 54% of GDP, the agricultural sector 28%, and the industrial sector 18%. Major agricultural products include rice, wheat, oilseed, cotton, jute, tea, sugarcane, and potatoes.[161] Major industries include textiles, telecommunications, chemicals, food processing, steel, transport equipment, cement, mining, petroleum, machinery, and software.[161] In 2006, the share of external trade in India's GDP stood at 24%, up from 6% in 1985.[191] In 2008, India's share of world trade was 1.68%;[194] India was the world's fifteenth-largest importer in 2009 and the eighteenth-largest exporter.[195] Major exports include petroleum products, textile goods, jewelry, software, engineering goods, chemicals, and leather manufactures.[161] Major imports include crude oil, machinery, gems, fertiliser, and chemicals.[161] Between 2001 and 2011, the contribution of petrochemical and engineering goods to total exports grew from 14% to 42%.[196]

The Bombay Stock Exchange is Asia's oldest and India's largest stock exchange by market capitalisation.

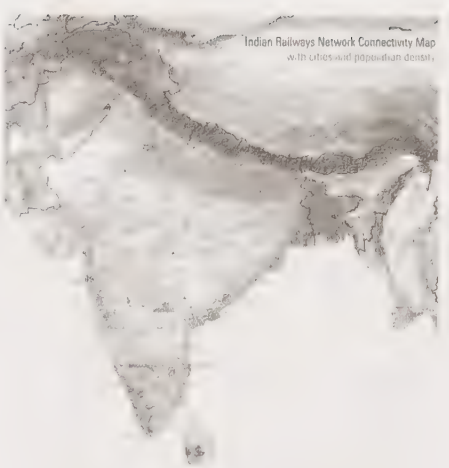
Averaging an economic growth rate of 7.5% during the last few years,[191] India has more than doubled its hourly wage rates during the last decade.[197] Some 431 million Indians have left poverty since 1985; India's middle classes are projected to number around 580 million by 2030.[198] Though ranking 51st in global competitiveness, India ranks 17th in financial market sophistication, 24th in the banking sector, 44th in business sophistication, and 39th in innovation, ahead of several advanced economies.[199] With 7 of the world's top 15 information technology outsourcing companies based in India, the country is viewed as the second-most favourable outsourcing destination after the United States.[200] India's consumer market, currently the world's thirteenth-largest, is expected to become fifth-largest by 2030.[198] Its telecommunication industry, the world's fastest-growing, added 227 million subscribers during the period 2010–11.[201] Its automotive industry, the world's second fastest growing, increased domestic sales by 26% during 2009–10,[202] and exports by 36% during 2008–09.[203] Power capacity is 250 gigawatts, of which 8% is renewable.[204]

Despite impressive economic growth during recent decades, India continues to face socio-economic challenges. India contains the largest concentration of people living below the World Bank's international poverty line of US$1.25 per day,[205] the proportion having decreased from 60% in 1981 to 42% in 2005.[206] Half of the children in India are underweight,[207] and 46% of children under the age of three suffer from malnutrition.[205] The Mid-Day Meal Scheme attempts to lower these rates.[208] Since 1991, economic inequality between India's states has consistently grown: the per-capita net state domestic product of the richest states in 2007 was 3.2 times that of the poorest.[209] Corruption in India is perceived to have increased significantly,[210] with one report estimating the illegal capital flows since independence to be US$462 billion.[211] Driven by growth, India's nominal GDP per capita has steadily increased from US$329 in 1991, when economic liberalisation began, to US$1,265 in 2010, and is estimated to increase to US$2,110 by 2016; however, it has always remained lower than those of other Asian developing countries such as Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, and is expected to remain so in the near future.[212]

According to a 2011 PwC report, India's GDP at purchasing power parity will overtake that of the United States by 2045.[213] During the next four decades, Indian GDP is expected to grow at an annualised average of 8%, making it potentially the world's fastest-growing major economy until 2050.[213] The report highlights key growth factors: a young and rapidly growing working-age population; growth in the manufacturing sector due to rising education and engineering skill levels; and sustained growth of the consumer market driven by a rapidly growing middle class.[213] The World Bank cautions that, for India to achieve its economic potential, it must continue to focus on public sector reform, transport infrastructure, agricultural and rural development, removal of labour regulations, education, energy security, and public health and nutrition.[214]

Demographics

With 1,210,193,422 residents reported in the 2011 provisional Census,[6] India is the world's second-most populous country. Its population grew at 1.76% per annum during the last decade,[6] down from 2.13% per annum in the previous decade (1991–2001).[215] The human sex ratio, according to the 2011 census, is 940 females per 1,000 males.[6] The median age was 24.9 in the 2001 census.[8] Medical advances made in the last 50 years as well as increased agricultural productivity brought about by the "Green Revolution" have caused India's population to grow rapidly.[216] India continues to face several public health-related challenges.[217][218] According to the World Health Organization, 900,000 Indians die each year from drinking contaminated water or breathing polluted air.[219] There are around 50 physicians per 100,000 Indians.[220] The percentage of Indians living in urban areas has grown by 31.2% between 1991 and 2001.[221] Yet, in 2001, over 70% lived in rural areas.[222][223] According to the 2001 census, there are 27 million-plus cities in India,[221] with Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, and Chennai being the largest. The literacy rate in 2011 was 74.04%: 65.46% among females and 82.14% among males.[6] Kerala is the most literate state;[224] Bihar the least.[225]



Population density and Indian Railways connectivity map. The already densely settled Indo-Gangetic Plain is the main driver of Indian population growth.

A woman in Bundi, Rajasthan.

India is home to two major language families: Indo-Aryan (spoken by about 74% of the population) and Dravidian (24%). Other languages spoken in India come from the Austro-Asiatic and Tibeto-Burman language families. India has no national language.[226] Hindi, with the largest number of speakers, is the official language of the government.[227][228] English is used extensively in business and administration and has the status of a "subsidiary official language";[229] it is important in education, especially as a medium of higher education. Each state and union territory has one or more official languages, and the constitution recognises in particular 21 "scheduled languages". The Indian Constitution recognises 212 scheduled tribal groups which together constitute about 7.5% of the country's population.[230] The 2001 census reported that Hinduism, with over 800 million adherents (80.5% of the population), was the largest religion in India; they are followed by Muslims (13.4%), Christians (2.3%), Sikhs (1.9%), Buddhists (0.8%), Jains (0.4%), Jews, Zoroastrians, and Bahá'ís.[231] India has the world's largest Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Zoroastrian, and Bahá'í populations, and has the third-largest Muslim population and the largest Muslim population for a non-Muslim majority country.

Culture

Indian cultural history spans more than 4,500 years.[232] During the Vedic age (c. 1700–500 BCE), the foundations of Hindu philosophy, mythology, and literature were laid, and many beliefs and practices which still exist today, such as *dhárma*, *kárma*, *yóga*, and *mokṣa*, were established.[112] India is notable for its religious diversity, with Hinduism, Sikhism, Islam, Christianity, and Jainism among the nation's major religions.[233] The predominant religion, Hinduism, has been shaped by various historical schools of thought, including those of the *Upanishads*,[234] the *Yoga Sutras*, the *Bhakti* movement,[233] and by Buddhist philosophy.[235]

Art, architecture, and literature

Much of Indian architecture, including the Taj Mahal, other works of Mughal architecture, and South Indian architecture, blends ancient local traditions with imported styles.[236] Vernacular architecture is also highly regional in it flavours.

The earliest literary writings in India, composed between 1,400 BCE and 1,200 AD, were in the Sanskrit language.[237][238] Prominent works of this Sanskrit literature include epics such as the Mahābhārata and the Ramayana, the dramas of Kālidāsa such as the *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* (*The Recognition of Śakuntalā*), and poetry such as the *Mahākāvya*.[239][240][241] Developed between 600 BCE and 300 AD in South India, the *Sangam* literature, consisting of 2,381 poems, is regarded as a predecessor of Tamil literature.[242][243][244][245] From the 14th century AD to the 18th century AD, India's literary traditions went through a period of drastic change because of the emergence of devotional poets such as Kabīr, Tulsīdās, and Guru Nānak. This period was characterised by a varied and wide spectrum of thought and expression; as a consequence, medieval Indian literary works differed significantly from classical traditions.[246] In the 19th century, Indian writers took a new interest in social questions and psychological descriptions. Twentieth-century Indian literature was influenced by the works of Bengali poet and novelist Rabindranath Tagore.[247]

Performing arts

Indian music ranges over various traditions and regional styles. Classical music encompasses two genres and their various folk offshoots: the northern Hindustani and southern Carnatic schools.[248] Regionalised popular forms include filmi and folk music; the syncretic tradition of the *bauls* is a well-known form of the latter. Indian dance also features diverse folk and classical forms. Among the better-known folk dances are the *bhangra* of the Punjab, the *bihu* of Assam, the *chhau* of West Bengal and Jharkhand, *sambalpuri* of Orissa, *ghoomar* of Rajasthan, and the *Lavani* of Maharashtra. Eight dance forms, many with narrative forms and mythological elements, have been accorded classical dance status by India's National Academy of Music, Dance, and Drama. These are: *bharatanatyam* of the state of Tamil Nadu, *kathak* of Uttar Pradesh, *kathakali* and *mohiniyattam* of Kerala, *kuchipudi* of Andhra Pradesh, *manipuri* of Manipur, *odissi* of Orissa, and the *sattriya* of Assam.[249]

Theatre in India melds music, dance, and improvised or written dialogue.[250] Often based on Hindu mythology, but also borrowing from medieval romances or social and political events, Indian theatre includes the *bhavai* of Gujarat, the *jatra* of West Bengal, the *nautanki* and *ramlila* of North India, *tamasha* of Maharashtra, *burrakatha* of Andhra Pradesh, *terukkuttu* of Tamil Nadu, and the *yakshagana* of Karnataka.[251] The Indian film industry produces the world's most-watched cinema.[252] Established regional cinematic traditions exist in the Assamese, Bengali, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Tamil, and Telugu languages.[253] South Indian cinema attracts more than 75% of national film revenue.[254]

Society

Traditional Indian society is defined by relatively strict social hierarchy. The Indian caste system embodies much of the social stratification and many of the social restrictions found in the Indian subcontinent. Social classes are defined by thousands of endogamous hereditary groups, often termed as *jātis*, or "castes".[255] Most Dalits ("Untouchables") and members of other lower-caste communities continue to live in segregation and often face persecution and discrimination.[256][257] Traditional Indian family values are highly valued, and multi-generational patriarchal joint families have been the norm in India, though nuclear families are becoming common in urban areas.[258] An overwhelming majority of Indians, with their consent, have their marriages arranged by their parents or other family members.[259] Marriage is thought to be for life,[259] and the divorce rate is extremely low.[260] Child marriage is still a common practice, more so in rural India, with more than half of women in India marrying before the legal age of 18.[261]

Many Indian festivals are religious in origin. The best known include Diwali, Ganesh Chaturthi, Thai Pongal, Navaratri, Holi, Durga Puja, Eid ul-Fitr, Bakr-Id, Christmas, and Vaisakhi. India has three national holidays which are observed in all states and union territories: Republic Day, Independence Day, and Gandhi Jayanti. Other sets of holidays, varying between nine and twelve, are officially observed in individual states. Traditional Indian dress varies in colour and style across regions and depends on various factors, including climate and faith. Popular styles of dress include draped garments such as the *sari* for women and the *dhoti* or *lungi* for men. Stitched clothes, such as the *shalwar kameez* for women and *kurta-pyjama* combinations or European-style trousers and shirts for men, are also popular.[262] Use of delicate jewellery, modelled on real flowers worn in ancient India, is part of a tradition dating back some 5,000 years; gemstones are also worn in India as talismans.[263]

Indian cuisine is best known for its delicate use of herbs and spices and for its tandoori grilling techniques. The *tandoor*, a clay oven in use for almost 5,000 years in India, is known for its ability to grill meats to an "uncommon succulence" and for the puffy flatbread known as *naan*.[264] Staple foods in the region are rice (especially in the south and the east), wheat (predominantly in the north),[265] and lentils.[266] Many spices which have worldwide appeal are

native to the Indian subcontinent, while chili pepper, native to the Americas and introduced by the Portuguese, is widely used in Indian cuisine.

Sport

In India, several traditional indigenous sports remain fairly popular, among them *kabaddi*, *kho kho*, *pehlwani*, and *gilli-danda*. Some of the earliest forms of Asian martial arts, such as *kalarippayattu*, *musti yuddha*, *silambam*, and *marma adi*, originated in India. The Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna and the Arjuna Award are the highest forms of government recognition for athletic achievement; the Dronacharya Award is awarded for excellence in coaching. Chess, commonly held to have originated in India as *chaturaṅga*, is regaining widespread popularity with the rise in the number of Indian Grandmasters.[267][268] *Pachisi*, from which parcheesi derives, was played on a giant marble court by Akbar.[269] Tennis has become increasingly popular; this stems from the victorious India Davis Cup team and the recent successes of Indian tennis players.[270] India has a comparatively strong presence in shooting sports, and has won several medals at the Olympics, the World Shooting Championships, and the Commonwealth Games.[271][272] Other sports in which Indians have succeeded internationally include badminton,[273] boxing,[274] and wrestling.[275] Football is popular in the North-East, West Bengal, Goa, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala.[276]

Kalarippayattu, a martial art native to Kerala.

India's official national sport is field hockey; it is administered by Hockey India. The Indian national hockey team won the 1975 Hockey World Cup and have, as of 2011, taken eight gold, one silver, and two bronze Olympic medals, making it the sport's most successful team. Cricket is by far the most popular sport; the Indian national cricket team won the 1983 and 2011 World Cups, the 2007 ICC World Twenty20, and shared the 2002 ICC Champions Trophy with Sri Lanka. Cricket in India is administered by the Board of Control for Cricket in India, or BCCI; the Ranji Trophy, the Duleep Trophy, the Deodhar Trophy, the Irani Trophy, and the NKP Salve Challenger Trophy are domestic competitions. The BCCI conducts a Twenty20 competition known as the Indian Premier League. India has hosted or co-hosted several international sporting events: the 1951 and 1982 Asian Games; the 1987, 1996, and 2011 Cricket World Cups; the 2003 Afro-Asian Games; the 2006 ICC Champions Trophy; the 2010 Hockey World Cup; and the 2010 Commonwealth Games. Major international sporting events held annually in India include the Chennai Open, Mumbai Marathon, Delhi Half Marathon, and the Indian Masters. The first Indian Grand Prix featured in late 2011.

Notes

[1] National Informatics Centre 2005
[2] Wolpert 2003, p. 1
[3] "[...] *Jana Gana Mana* is the National Anthem of India, subject to such alterations in the words as the Government may authorise as occasion arises; and the song *Vande Mataram*, which has played a historic part in the struggle for Indian freedom, shall be honoured equally with *Jana Gana Mana* and shall have equal status with it." (Constituent Assembly of India 1950).
[4] The Times of India 2007
[5] This is the figure given by the United Nations, though the Indian government lists the total area as 3287260 km^2 (**unknown operator: u'strong'** sq mi)."The country's exact size is subject to debate because some borders are disputed. The Indian government lists the total area as 3287260 km^2 (**unknown operator: u'strong'** sq mi) and the total land area as 3060500 km^2 (**unknown operator: u'strong'** sq mi); the United Nations lists the total area as 3287263 km^2 (**unknown operator: u'strong'** sq mi) and total land area as 2973190 km^2 (**unknown operator: u'strong'** sq mi)." (Library of Congress 2004).
[6] Ministry of Home Affairs 2011
[7] International Monetary Fund
[8] Central Intelligence Agency
[9] United Nations 2011
[10] Stein 2008, pp. 16–17
[11] Oxford English Dictionary
[12] Kuiper 2010, p. 86
[13] Ministry of Law and Justice 2008
[14] Encyclopædia Britannica
[15] Singh 2009, p. 64
[16] Singh 2009, pp. 89–93
[17] Possehl 2003, pp. 24–25
[18] Kulke & Rothermund 2004, pp. 21–23
[19] Singh 2009, p. 181
[20] Possehl 2003, p. 2

[21] Singh 2009, p. 255
[22] Singh 2009, pp. 186–187
[23] Kulke & Rothermund 2004, pp. 41–43
[24] Singh 2009, pp. 250–251
[25] Singh 2009, p. 319
[26] Kulke & Rothermund 2004, pp. 53–54
[27] Kulke & Rothermund 2004, pp. 54–56
[28] Stein 2008, pp. 67–68
[29] Singh 2009, pp. 312–313
[30] Singh 2009, p. 300
[31] Stein 2008, pp. 78–79
[32] Kulke & Rothermund 2004, p. 70
[33] Singh 2009, p. 367
[34] Kulke & Rothermund 2004, p. 63
[35] Stein 2008, pp. 89–90
[36] Singh 2009, pp. 408–415
[37] Stein 2008, pp. 92–95
[38] Kulke & Rothermund 2004, pp. 89–91
[39] Singh 2009, p. 545
[40] Stein 2008, pp. 98–99
[41] Stein 2008, p. 132
[42] Stein 2008, pp. 119–120
[43] Stein 2008, pp. 121–122
[44] Stein 2008, p. 123
[45] Stein 2008, p. 124
[46] Stein 2008, pp. 127–128
[47] Ludden 2002, p. 68
[48] Asher & Talbot 2008, p. 47
[49] Metcalf & Metcalf 2006, p. 6
[50] Ludden 2002, p. 67
[51] Asher & Talbot 2008, pp. 50–51
[52] Asher & Talbot 2008, p. 53
[53] Metcalf & Metcalf 2006, p. 12
[54] Robb 2001, p. 80
[55] Stein 2008, p. 164
[56] Asher & Talbot 2008, p. 115
[57] Robb 2001, pp. 90–91
[58] Metcalf & Metcalf 2006, p. 17
[59] Asher & Talbot 2008, p. 152
[60] Asher & Talbot 2008, p. 158
[61] Stein 2008, p. 169
[62] Asher & Talbot 2008, p. 186
[63] Metcalf & Metcalf 2006, pp. 23–24
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Lakshmi

Lakshmi	
Lakshmi by Raja Ravi Varma	
Devanagari	लक्ष्मी
Sanskrit Transliteration	lakṣmī
Affiliation	Devi (Tridevi), Shakti
Consort	Vishnu
Mount	Elephant, owl

Lakshmi (Sanskrit: लक्ष्मी *lakṣmī*, Hindi pronunciation: [ˈləkʃmi], Gujarati: , Tamil: லட்சுமி *latchumi*, Telugu: , Lakshmi) or **Lakumi** (Kannada:) is the Hindu goddess of wealth, prosperity (both material and spiritual), light, wisdom, fortune, fertility, generosity and courage; and the embodiment of beauty, grace and charm. Representations of Lakshmi are also found in Jain monuments. Also called Mahalakshmi, she is said to bring good luck, and is believed to protect her devotees from all kinds of misery and money-related sorrows.

Lakshmi in Sanskrit is derived from its elemental form *lakS*, meaning "to perceive or observe".[1] This is synonymous with *lakṣya*, meaning "aim" or "objective". In Hindu sacred texts, the Vedas call Mahalakshmi *Lakshyayidhi Lakshmihi* which means she is the one who has the object and aim of uplifting mankind.

Mahalakshmi is called *Shri* or *Thirumagal* (திருமகள் in Tamil; in Telugu) because she is endowed with six auspicious and divine qualities, or Gunas, and also because she is the source of strength even to Lord Narayana. She is the consort of Vishnu[2] and married Rama (in her incarnation as Sita) and Krishna (as Radha[3][4][5] and later Rukmini). All the wives of Krishna were forms of Lakshmi.[6]

In Durga Puja in Bengal, Lakshmi is considered to be a daughter of Durga along with her sister Saraswati and her brothers Ganesha and Karthikeya.[7]

Evolution and legends

In Hinduism, Devas (gods) and asuras (demons) were both mortal at one time. Amrit, the divine nectar that would grant immortality, could be obtained only by churning the Kshirsagar (Ocean of Milk). The devas and asuras both sought immortality and decided to churn the Kshirsagar. With the devas on one side and the asuras on the other, the samudra manthan commenced. Vishnu incarnated as Kurma, the tortoise, on whom was placed a mountain as a churning pole; Vasuki, the great venom-spewing serpent, was wrapped around it and used to churn the ocean. A host of divine celestial objects came up during the churning. Among these, was the goddess Lakshmi, the daughter of the king of the milky ocean. The last to come up was the amrita. With this, the avatar of Kurma, the tortoise, ended. Vishnu then took up the form of a beautiful maiden to distract the asuras and gave immortality to the devas.

Mahalakshmi has always existed. Her appearance from samudra manthan is her main manifestation only. Mahalakshmi was also born to the great sage Bhrigu, and she is therefore also called Bhargavi. Mahalakshmi is also the sister of the great guru Sukracharya as well as the great planet Chandra. Each time Vishnu descends on earth as an avatar, He is accompanied by an avatar of Lakshmi.

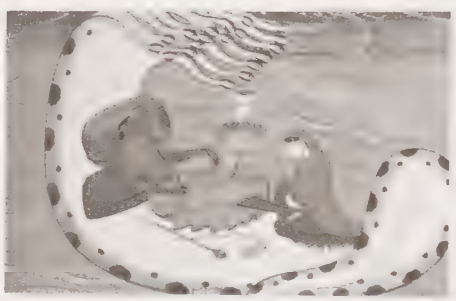
The moon (chandra) also appeared from the ocean during the churning, making it her brother. Alakshmi, the goddess of misfortune, is Lakshmi's elder sister. According to the Vishnu Purana, Lakshmi is the daughter of Bhrigu and Khyaati and resided in Swarga, but, due to the curse of Durvasa, she left Swarga and made Ksheersagara her home.

The etymology and meanings of the word *lakshmi* is given in Monier Williams' *Sanskrit–English Dictionary* compiled in the 19th century in British India.

1. laksmIka meaning a mark, sign, or token is in Rik Veda x, 71, 2 and Nirukta iv, 10.
2. laksmi (with or without pAp'I) is a bad sign or an impending misfortune referred to Atharva Veda and Apasthambha Shrauta Suutra.
3. In older Sanskrit, it is usually used with "p'uNyA" meaning a good sign, good fortune, prosperity, success, or happiness in Atharva Veda.
4. Laksmi personifies wealth, riches, beauty, loveliness, grace, charm, splendour, and lustre in Mahabharata.
5. Laksmi as a noun is a goddess of fortune and beauty (frequently in the later mythology identified with Śrī and regarded as the wife of Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇa).
6. According to Sir Monier Williams, "Religious thought and life in India", 45, 40-43 she sprang with other precious things from the foam of the ocean when churned by the gods and demons for the recovery of the Amṛta. She appeared with a lotus in her hand, whence she is also called Padmā.
7. According to another legend, she appeared at the creation floating over the water on the expanded petals of a lotus flower; she is also variously regarded as wife of Sūrya, as wife of Prajā-pati, as wife of Dharma and mother of Kāma, as sister or mother of Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ, as wife of Datt^atreya, as one of the nine Śaktis of Viṣṇu, as a manifestation of Prakṛti, as identified with Dākshāyaṇī in Bharat^aśrama, and with Sītā, wife of Rāma, and with other women.

Explanation of Mahalakshmi

Mahalakshmi is the presiding Goddess of the Middle episode of Devi Mahatmya. Here, she is depicted as Devi in her universal form as Shakti. The manifestation of the Devi to kill Mahishasura is formed by the effulgences of all the gods. The Goddess is described as eighteen-armed, bearing a string of beads, battle axe, mace, arrow, thunderbolt, lotus, bow, water pot, cudgel, lance, sword, shield, conch, bell, wine cup, trident, noose and the discus *sudarsana*. She has a complexion of coral and is seated on a lotus.[8] She is known as Ashta Dasa Bhuja Mahalakshmi.



Lakshmi with Vishnu at Vaikuntha Pahari Painting

She is seen in two forms, Bhudevi and Sridevi, both either side of Sri Venkateshwara or Vishnu. Bhudevi is the representation and totality of the material world or energy, called the aparam Prakriti, in which she is called Mother Earth. Sridevi is the spiritual world or energy, called the Param Prakriti. Most people are mistaken that they are separate beings although they are one, Lakshmi. Lakshmi is the power of Lord Vishnu.

Mahalakshmi's presence is also found on Lord Sri Venkateswara (at Tirumala) or Vishnu's chest, at the heart. Lakshmi is the embodiment of love, from which devotion to God or Bhakti flows from. It is through Love/Bhakti or Lakshmi that the atma or soul is able to reach God or Vishnu. Lakshmi plays a special role as the mediator between her husband Lord Vishnu and His worldly devotees. While Vishnu is often conceived of as a stern, easily perturbed patriarch, Lakshmi represents a more soothing, warm and approachable mother figure who willingly intervenes in the lives of devotees on His behalf. Often, it is Lakshmi who acts as the advocate for the request of a given mortal. When asking Vishnu for grace or the forgiveness of sins, Hindus often approach Him through the intermediary presence of Lakshmi.[9] She is also the personification of the spiritual energy, called Kundalini, within us and the universe. Also, she embodies the spiritual world, also known as Vaikunta, the abode of Lakshmi-Narayana or Vishnu, or what would be considered Heaven in Vaishnavism. She is also the divine qualities of God and the soul. Lakshmi is the embodiment of God's superior spiritual feminine energy, or the Param Prakriti, which purifies, empowers and uplifts the individual. Hence, she is called the Goddess of Fortune. Due to her motherly feelings and being the consort of Narayan (Supreme Being), she is believed as the Mother of the Universe.[10][11][12]

Epithets

Lakshmi has many names. She is known to be very closely associated with the lotus, and her many epithets are connected to the flower, such as:

Prakruti - Mahalakshmi is the very personification of nature, the centre of all, the manifested and the unmanifested.

Vikruti - Mahalakshmi is the multi-faceted Nature, who assumes many forms, known by numerous names, yet is attributeless.

Vidya - Mahalakshmi is the very personification of Wisdom.

Padma: lotus dweller

- *Kamala*: lotus dweller
- *Padmapriya*: One who likes lotuses
- *Padmamaladhara devi*: One who wears a garland of lotuses
- *Padmamukhi*: One whose face is as beautiful as a lotus
- *Padmakshi*: One whose eyes are as beautiful as a lotus
- *Padmahasta*: One who holds a lotus
- *Padmasundari*: One who is as beautiful as a lotus
- *Vishnupriya*: One who is the beloved of Vishnu
- *Ulkavahini*: One who rides an owl

Her other names include: Manushri, Chakrika, Kamalika, Lalima, Kalyani, Nandika, Rujula, Vaishnavi, Narayani, Bhargavi, Sridevi, Chanchala, Bhumi Devi, Jalaja, Madhavi, Sujata, Shreya and Aiswarya. She is also referred to as Jaganmaatha ("Mother of the Universe") in Shri Mahalakshmi Ashtakam. Rama and Indira are popular.

Vishnu with Lakshmi (*Lakshminarayana*) at Halebidu

Iconography

Lakshmi is described as bestowing coins of prosperity and flanked by elephants signifying her royal power. However, in some texts, she has an owl as her vahana. Her expression is always calm and loving. The lotus also symbolizes the fertile growth of organic life, as the world is continually reborn on a lotus growing out of Vishnu's navel.

Lakshmi is worshipped daily, but special focus is given in the month of October. Her worship ceremonies include people offering food and sweets, chanting her 108 names, prayers repeated, and devotional songs being sung.

A 1400-year-old rare granite sculpture of Goddess Lakshmi has been recovered at the Waghama village along the Jehlum in Anantnag district of Jammu and Kashmir.[13]

Secondary manifestations

Ashta Lakshmi (Sanskrit: अष्टलक्ष्मी,Aṣṭalakṣmī, lit. "eight Lakshmis") are a group of eight secondary manifestations of Lakshmi, who preside over eight sources of wealth and thus represent the powers of Shri-Lakshmi. Actually, Mahalakshmi presides over eighteen forms of wealth, ten of which are the eight great siddhis called AshtaSiddhis, the spiritual knowledge or Gnana, and teaching or imparting the spiritual knowledge to the entire world without any class difference.

Mahalakshmi is also known to preside over 16 forms of worldly wealth excluding Ashta siddhis, gnana and imparting gnana. They are as follows: (1) Fame; (2) Knowledge; (3) Courage and Strength; (4) Victory; (5) Good Children; (6) Valor; (7) Gold, Gems and Other Valuables; (8) Grains in abundance; (9) Happiness; (10) Bliss; (11) Intelligence; (12) Beauty; (13) Higher Aim, High Thinking and Higher Meditation; (14) Morality and Ethics; (15) Good Health; (16) Long Life.

Mahalakshmi of Kolhapur

Ashta Lakshmi

आदि लक्ष्मी ( )	Ādi Lakṣmī	The First manifestation of Lakshmi
धान्य लक्ष्मी ( )	Dhānya Lakṣmī	Granary wealth
धैर्य लक्ष्मी ( )	Dhairya Lakṣmī	Wealth of courage
गज लक्ष्मी ( )	Gaja Lakṣmī	Elephants, symbols of wealth
सन्तान लक्ष्मी ( )	Santāna Lakṣmī	Wealth of continuity, progeny
विजय लक्ष्मी ( )	Vijaya Lakṣmī	Wealth of victory
विद्या लक्ष्मी ( )	Vidyā Lakṣmī	Wealth of knowledge and education
धन लक्ष्मी ( )	Dhana Lakṣmī	Monetary wealth

It must be kept in mind that the type of Ashta Lakshmis differ with every yuga and thus one would not find uniformity in the names of Ashta lakshmis in Hindu sacred texts. There are more than crores manifestations of Mahalakshmi; without her nothing in this world would survive as she forms the basis of the entire gamut of creation. Without her grace there will be nothing to eat, no air to breathe, no progeny in continuation etc. At a minor level, one cannot survive without monetary wealth in this wide world, if one has not developed spiritualism. Even if one were to beg, one would not get even a dime without the grace of Mahalskhmi. It is only through the grace of Mahalakshmi that even the King of Gods, Devandra, gained wealth, when He was cursed by the famous sage Dhurvasa for disrespecting the garland offered to Him.

Mahalkshmi is also said to exist in several other forms. The most famous amonsgt them are Sridevi, Bhoodevi, and Neeladevi. The famous Vaishnavite saint Aandaal, who was born in Srivilliputhur about 5050 years ago, is an incarnation of Mahalakshmi herself. Sridevi represents moveable assets, called Chanchala in Sanskrit. Bhoodevi represents immoveable assets (Achanchala). It is because of this that mountains in India are prefixed with Achanachala, for example, Arunachala, Himachala etc. The term chanchala also denotes fickleness, which is why people are not always wealthy. Everything in this world operates only with the grace of Mahalakshmi.

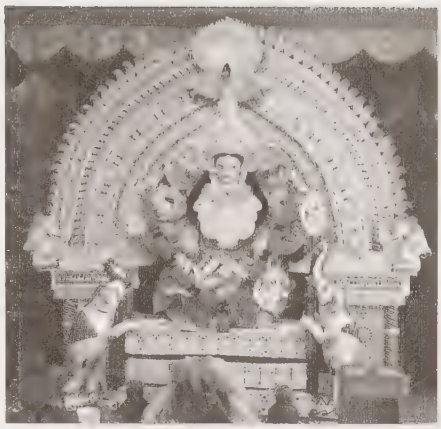
Celebration in Hindu society

Hindus worship Lakshmi the most on Diwali, the festival of lights. According to tradition, people would put small oil lamps outside their homes on Diwali in hopes Lakshmi will come to bless them.

The prefix *Sri* (also spelled *Shri*, pronounced as shree) translates as "one who takes delight in". Therefore, Sri Lakshmi, means wealth of any kind. Any thing that need be affluent gets the auspicious prefix or suffix *Lakshmi*, or *Sri*, such as Rajya Lakshmi (Wealth of Empire), Shanti Sri (Wealth of Peace), etc. In modern India, common titles standing in for the English *Mr.* and *Mrs.* are *Shri* (also *Sri* or *Shree*) and *Shrimati* (also *Srimati* or *Shreemati*), as in *Sri desai* or *Srimati shanti*.

In Uttarakhand, after the worship of the goddess on Diwali night, the shankha, or conch, is not blown. This is because the shankha is also from the ocean like the goddess herself, so it is given a day of rest.

Karaveera Nivasini Mahalakshmi, also known as Ambabai, is the patron goddess of Kolhapur city, Maharashtra.



Lakshmi murti at Bhubaneswar during (Laxmi Puja) Festival

Bengal

In Bengal, Lakshmi is worshiped during divali night in autumn when the moon is full, the brightest night of the year. It is believed that she showers wealth on this night. She, along with her mount, the great white owl, descends to Earth and takes away the darkness of poverty, stagnation, anger, and laziness from our lives. Her vahana owl represents royalties, penetrating sight and intelligence. It serves as her mount over which she has full control. Lakshmi is also referred to as *pranadayini*("giver of vital life-sustaining energy") who can turn a dull thing full of life.

Kojagiri Lakshmi puja

Appearance

Lakshmi is depicted in a red costume, which represents continuous activity, or in a golden costume, representing fulfillment. She wears ornaments full of gold and a golden ruby-studded crown. Her hair is long, dark and wavy. Her complexion is golden, representing a boon-giver. She shows the abhaya mudra or the gyan mudra with her right hand and holds a potful of gold in her left arm and paddy sheaf in her left hand.

She is related to the chakras of the solar plexus and the heart.

In the Sri Vaishnava philosophy, Sri (Lakshmi) is honored as the *Iswarigm sarva bhootanam*, i.e., the supreme goddess and not just the goddess of wealth.

Orissa

Manabasa Gurubara

With the harvest brought home, the farmers feel greatly satisfied with the yield. After six months of toil in the field, they fill the granaries with the blessings of Lakshmi. So, the whole month of Mrigashīrsha (December–January) is spent in worshipping the goddess. All the rituals connected with the festival *Manabasa Gurubara* or *Lakshmi Puja* are done by housewives. On each Thursday of the month, the houses are plastered with cow dung, and the floors are decorated with beautiful floral designs drawn with rice powder mixed with water, called jhoti. Footprints are painted from the doorstep to the place of worship, as if Goddess Lakshmi has entered the house. The roofs are decorated with flower garlands and festoons woven out of paddy stalks.

Main ritual After a purification bath in the morning, the housewives worship the goddess, not through an image, but significantly through paddy measures. Different varieties of rice cakes and *Khiri* (rice soup prepared with milk and sugar) are prepared in every household and are offered to the deity and then eaten by all.

The legend In the evening, the Laxmi Puran, in which an interesting story is told, is read or recited. Once Shreeya, an untouchable woman, worshipped Lakshmi by observing this festival. Being moved by her devotion, Lakshmi left her permanent abode, the temple that is situated inside the campus of the temple of Lord Jagannatha, and visited Shreeya's house. When Lord Balabhadra, the elder brother of Lord Jagannatha, came to know about this, she was declared defiled and was not allowed to come back into the temple. Lakshmi was deeply hurt and went to her father, Sagara.

When Lakshmi went out of the temple, all wealth in the temple started vanishing. Later, Balabhadra and Jagannatha could not find food to sustain themselves. They came out of the temple in the attire of Brahmin beggars in search of food. Ultimately, They landed at the door of Lakshmi. Balabhadra apologised for the mistake, and all of them returned to the temple.

The *Purana* ultimately teaches all to pay extreme regards to Lakshmi, and the person who disregards her is sure to fall on evil days. This means that wealth should be well protected and properly used, for misuse of wealth is sure to make a person suffer.

Gaja

Gaja Lakshmi Puja is celebrated in the Sharad Purnima, the full-moon day in the Oriya month of *Aswina*(September–October). This autumn festival is one of the most popular and important festivals of Orissa. The goddess of wealth is worshiped for one day, and, in some places, it is celebrated for seven to ten days, and the festival is religiously celebrated by the business community in Orissa. All over Orissa, richly decorated and beautifully made images of Gaja Lakshmi are installed, and the festival instills a spirit of holiness and sanctity into the whole community, so much so that people of other faiths participate in it with abundant warmth and sincerity. In Orissa, this festival, also known as Kumar Purnima, falls on the full moon - Purnima. Girls and boys wear new clothes and generally have a good time with family and friends.

Azilises coin depicting Gaja Lakshmi standing on a lotus, 1st century BCE.

In the early morning, the girls, after their purification baths, wear new garments and make food offerings to the sun. They observe fasting for the day. In the evening, when the moon rises, they again make food offerings of a special variety and eat it after the rituals are over.

It is a festival of rejoicing for the girls; all of them sing and dance. The songs are of a special nature. They also play a kind of game known as *Puchi*. They also indulge in other varieties of country games.

Worship

There are innumerable slokas in praise of Mahalakshmi. Some of the most famous prayers for worshipping her are: **Sri Mahalakshmi Ashtakam**, **Sri Lakshmi Sahasaranama Sthothra** by Sanathkumara, **Sri Stuti** By Sri Vedantha Desikar, Sri Lakshmi Stuti By Indra, **Sri Kanakadhara Sthothra** by Sri Aadhi Shankaracharya, **Sri Chatussloki** by Sri Yamunacharya, **Sri Lakshmi Sloka** by Bhagavan Sri Hari Swamiji, and Sri Sukta which is contained in the Vedas. The famous **Lakshmi Gayathri Sloka** " *Om Mahalakshmichae Vidmahe sri Vishnupathinichae Dhi-Mahi Thanno Lakshmi Prachodayat"* is a powerful prayer contained in the Vedic Sri Sukta, which when chanted everyday 108 times is known to grace the chanter with immediate grace of the Goddess within 90 days.

There is another famous prayer pronounced by the great sage Agastya: Agastya Lakshmi Stotra. Although Mother Lakshmi is worshipped as the goddess of fortune, when she is worshipped with Narayana, the worshipper is blessed with not only wealth but also peace and prosperity. They can be worshipped in various forms, such as Lakshmi Narayana, Lakshmi Narasimha, Sita Rama, Radha Krishna, or Vithal Rukmini. Another, lesser known, form of Lakshmi is worshiped in Karnataka as Hattilakamma, which is a furious form of Lakshmi and also two younger sisters Doddamma and Chikamma called Jalgeramma which are a form of Durga. Here people offer blood to these bloodthirsty goddesses, and use their hands to smear the blood on walls. It is believed that by doing so all the desires are fulfilled with in time span as they desired

Mantra

Sanskrit Mantra :[14]

English Mantra :
oṃ śrīṃ hrīṃ klīṃ tribhuvana mahālakṣmyai asmākam dāridrya nāśaya pracura dhana dehi dehi klīṃ hrīṃ śrīṃ oṃ

Respect for money

In many areas of India it is customary that, out of respect, when a person's foot accidentally touches money (which is considered as a manifestation of Lakshmi) or another person's leg, it will be followed by an apology in the form of a single hand gesture (Pranāma) with the right hand, where the offending person first touches the object with the finger tips and then the forehead and/or chest. This also counts for books and any written material, which are considered as a manifestation of the goddess of knowledge Saraswati.[15]

Temples

- Mahalakshmi Temple Dahanu
- Ashtalakshmi Kovil, Chennai
- Ashtalakshmi Temple, Hyderabad
- Mahalakshmi Temple, Kolhapur
- Mahalakshmi Temple, Mumbai
- Sri Mahalakshmi Temple, Goravanahalli near Bangalore
- Mahalakshmi temple, Brazil

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- *Hindu Goddesses: Vision of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Traditions* (ISBN 81-208-0379-5) by David Kinsley
- *Lakshmi Puja and Thousand Names* (ISBN 1-887472-84-3) by Swami Satyananda Saraswati

External links

- Mahalaxmi Temple, Ambabai Temple, Kolhapur (http://www.ambabai.com/ambabai.html)
- MahaLakshmi Puja (http://www.lokakshemayagna.org/activitiestrust?id=157)

Hindu

The Hindu is also the name of an Indian daily newspaper.

Hindu (pronunciation) refers to an identity associated with the philosophical, religious and cultural systems that are indigenous to the Indian subcontinent. As used in the Constitution of India, the word "Hindu" is also attributed to all persons professing any Indian religion (i.e. Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism or Sikhism).[1] In common use today, it refers to an adherent of Hinduism.

With more than a billion adherents, Hinduism is the world's third largest religion. The vast majority of Hindus, approximately 940 million, live in India.[2] Other countries with large Hindu populations include Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Suriname, Guyana, Trinidad & Tobago, Fiji and the island of Bali.

Etymology

The swastika in the Hindu decorative form.

The word *Hindu* is derived from the Sanskrit word *Sindhu*, first mentioned in the Rig Veda[3], was the historic local appellation for the Indus River in the northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent[4].

The Brihaspati Agama says:

The usage of the word *Hindu* was further popularized for Arabs and further west by the Arabic term *al-Hind* referring to the land of the people who live across river Indus[5] and the Persian term Hindū referring to all Indians. By the 13th century, *Hindustān* emerged as a popular alternative name of India, meaning the "land of *Hindus*".[6]

Originally, *Hindu* was a secular term which was used to describe all inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent (or *Hindustan*) irrespective of their religious affiliation. It occurs sporadically in some 16th-18th century Bengali Gaudiya Vaishnava texts, including *Chaitanya Charitamrita* and *Chaitanya Bhagavata*, usually to contrast Hindus with Yavanas or Mlecchas.[7] It appears in South Indian and Kashmiri texts from at least 1323 CE,[8] and increasingly so during British rule. It was only towards the end of the 18th century that the European merchants and colonists referred collectively to the followers of Indian religions as *Hindus*. Eventually, it came to define a precisely religious identity that includes any person of Indian origin who neither practiced Abrahamic religions nor non-Vedic Indian religions, such as Jainism, Sikhism or Buddhism, thereby encompassing a wide range of religious beliefs and practices related to Sanā tana Dharma.[9]

The term *Hinduism* was formed around 1830 to denote the culture and religion of the high-caste Brahmans in contrast to other religions. It was soon appropriated by the Hindus in India themselves as they tried to establish a national, social and cultural identity opposed to European colonialism in India.[9]

History

The notion of grouping the indigenous religions of India under a single umbrella term *Hindu* emerges as a result of various invasions in India bringing forth non-indigenous religions such as Islam to the Indian Subcontinent[10] Numerous Muslim invaders, such as Aurangzeb, destroyed Hindu temples and persecuted non-Muslims; some, such as Akbar, were more tolerant. Hinduism underwent profound changes, in large part due to the influence of the prominent teachers Ramanuja, Madhva and Chaitanya.[10] Followers of the Bhakti movement moved away from the abstract concept of Brahman, which the philosopher Adi Shankara consolidated a few centuries before, with emotional, passionate devotion towards what they believed as the more accessible Avatars, especially Krishna and Rama.[11]

The Swaminarayan sect's Akshardham Temple in Delhi, according the Guinness World Records is the *World's Largest Comprehensive Hindu Temple*

Indology as an academic discipline of studying Indian culture from a European perspective was established in the 19th century, led by scholars such as Max Müller and John Woodroffe. They brought Vedic, Puranic and Tantric literature and philosophy to Europe and the United States. At the same time, societies such as the Brahmo Samaj and the Theosophical Society attempted to reconcile and fuse Abrahamic and Dharmic philosophies, endeavouring to institute societal reform. This period saw the emergence of movements which, while highly innovative, were rooted in indigenous tradition. They were based on the personalities and teachings of individuals, as with Ramakrishna and Ramana Maharshi. Prominent Hindu philosophers, including Aurobindo and Prabhupada (founder of ISKCON), translated, reformulated and presented Hinduism's foundational texts for contemporary audiences in new iterations, attracting followers and attention in India and abroad.

Others, such as Vivekananda, Paramahansa Yogananda, B.K.S. Iyengar and Swami Rama, have also been instrumental in raising the profiles of Yoga and Vedanta in the West. Today modern movements, such as ISKCON and the Swaminarayan Faith, attract a large amount of followers across the world.[12]

Definition

The diverse set of religious beliefs, traditions and philosophies of the Hindus are the product of an amalgamation process that began with the decline of Buddhism in India (5th-8th Century), where traditions of Vedic Brahmanism and the mystical schools of Vedanta were combined with Shramana traditions and regional cults to give rise to the socio-religious and cultural sphere later described as "Hinduism".

Adi Shankara's commentaries on the Upanishads led to the rise of Advaita Vedanta, the most influential sub-school of Vedanta. Hinduism continues to be divided in numerous several sects and denominations, of which *Vaishnavism* and *Shaivism* are by far the most popular.[15] Other aspects include folk and conservative Vedic Hinduism. Since the 18th century, Hinduism has accommodated a host of new religious and reform movements, with Arya Samaj being one of the most notable Hindu revivalist organizations.

The *Bhagavad Gītā*, a conversation between Lord Krishna and Arjuna before the start of the Kurukshetra war, is one of the foremost Hindu scriptures[13] and is described as a concise guide to Hindu philosophy and beliefs.[14]

Due to the wide diversity in the beliefs, practices and traditions encompassed by Hinduism, there is no universally accepted definition on who a Hindu is, or even agreement on whether the term Hinduism represents a religious, cultural or socio-political entity. In 1995, Chief Justice P. B. Gajendragadkar was quoted in an Indian Supreme Court ruling:[16]

> When we think of the Hindu religion, unlike other religions in the world, the Hindu religion does not claim any one prophet; it does not worship any one god; it does not subscribe to any one dogma; it does not believe in any one philosophic concept; it does not follow any one set of religious rites or performances; in fact, it does not appear to satisfy the narrow traditional features of any religion or creed. It may broadly be described as a way of life and nothing more.

Thus some scholars argue that the Hinduism is not a religion *per se* but rather a reification of a diverse set of traditions and practices by scholars who constituted a unified system and arbitrarily labeled it Hinduism.[17] The usage may also have been necessitated by the desire to distinguish between "Hindus" and followers of other religions during the periodic census undertaken by the colonial British government in India. Other scholars, while seeing Hinduism as a 19th century construct, view Hinduism as a response to British colonialism by Indian nationalists who forged a unified tradition centered on oral and written Sanskrit texts adopted as scriptures.[18]

While Hinduism contains both "uniting and dispersing tendencies", it also has a common central thread of philosophical concepts (including dharma, moksha and samsara), practices (puja, bhakti etc.) and cultural traditions.[19] These common elements originating (or being codified within) the Vedic, Upanishad and Puranic scriptures and epics. Thus a Hindu could :

- follow any of the Hindu schools of philosophy, such as Advaita (non-dualism), Vishishtadvaita (non-dualism of the qualified whole), Dvaita (dualism), Dvaitadvaita (dualism with non-dualism), etc.[20][21]

- follow a tradition centered on any particular form of the Divine, such as Shaivism, Vaishnavism, Shaktism, etc.[22]
- practice any one of the various forms of yoga systems; including bhakti (Hindu devotional movements) in order to achieve *moksha*.

The Republic of India is in the peculiar situation that the Supreme Court of India has repeatedly been called upon to define "Hinduism" because the Constitution of India, while it prohibits "discrimination of any citizen" on grounds of religion in article 15, article 30 foresees special rights for "All minorities, whether based on religion or language". As a consequence, religious groups have an interest in being recognized as distinct from the Hindu majority in order to qualify as a "religious minority". Thus, the Supreme Court was forced to consider the question whether Jainism is part of Hinduism in 2005 and 2006. In the 2006 verdict, the Supreme Court found that the "Jain Religion is indisputably not a part of the Hindu Religion".[23] In 1995, while considering the question "who are Hindus and what are the broad features of Hindu religion", the Supreme Court of India highlighted Bal Gangadhar Tilak's formulation of Hinduism's defining features:[16]

> Acceptance of the Vedas with reverence; recognition of the fact that the means or ways to salvation are diverse; and the realization of the truth that the number of gods to be worshipped is large, that indeed is the distinguishing feature of Hindu religion.

A young Nepali Hindu devotee during a traditional prayer ceremony at Kathmandu's Durbar Square.

Some thinkers have attempted to distinguish between the concept of Hinduism as a religion, and a Hindu as a member of a nationalist or socio-political class. In Hindu nationalism, the term "Hindu" combines notions of geographical unity, common culture and common race. Thus, Veer Savarkar in his influential pamphlet "Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?" defined a Hindu as a person who sees India "as his Fatherland as well as his Holy land, that is, the cradle land of his religion".[24] This conceptualization of Hinduism, has led to establishment of Hindutva as the dominant force in Hindu nationalism over the last century.[25]

Ethnic and cultural fabric

Hinduism, its religious doctrines, traditions and observances are very typical and inextricably linked to the culture and demographics of India. Hinduism has one of the most ethnically diverse bodies of adherents in the world. It is hard to classify Hinduism as a religion because the framework, symbols, leaders and books of reference that make up a typical religion are not uniquely identified in the case of Hinduism. Hinduism is almost 4,000 years old. Most commonly it can be seen as a "way of life" which gives rise to many other forms of religions.

The Mother Temple of Besakih in Bali, Indonesia.

Large tribes and communities indigenous to India are closely linked to the synthesis and formation of Hindu civilization. People of East Asian roots living in the states of north eastern India and Nepal were also a part of the earliest Hindu civilization. Immigration and settlement of people from Central Asia and people of Indo-Greek heritage have brought their own influence on Hindu society.

The roots of Hinduism in southern India, and among tribal and indigenous communities is just as ancient and fundamentally contributive to the foundations of the religious and philosophical system.

Ancient Hindu kingdoms arose and spread the religion and traditions across Southeast Asia, particularly Thailand, Nepal, Burma, Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, Philippines, and what is now central Vietnam. A form of Hinduism particularly different from Indian roots and traditions is practiced in Bali, Indonesia, where Hindus form 90% of the population. Indian migrants have taken Hinduism and Hindu culture to South Africa, Fiji, Mauritius and other countries in and around the Indian Ocean, and in the nations of the West Indies and the Caribbean.

Diwali celebrations in Little India, Singapore.

Notes

[1] India-Constitution:Religious rights (http://www.unesco.org/most/rr3indi.htm) Article 25:*"Explanation II: In sub-Clause (b) of clause (2), the reference to Hindus shall be construed as including a reference to persons professing the Sikh, Jaina or Buddhist religion"*

[2] CIA World Factbook - India Demographics (https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/in.html) 80.5% of 1.166 billion Indians are Hindus

[3] http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/rigveda/rv10075.htm

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[8] David Lorenzen, *Who Invented Hinduism?* New Delhi 2006, pp. 24-33; Rajatarangini of Yonaraja : "Hinduka"

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[14] Maharishi Mahesh Yogi; On The Bhagavad Gita; A New Translation and Commentary With Sanskrit Text Chapters 1 to 6, Preface p. 9

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[19] Flood, Gavin, "Establishing the boundaries" in Flood (2003), pp. 1-17. (http://books.google.com/books?id=qSfneQ0YYY8C&lpg=PP1&dq=editions:qSfneQ0YYY8C&pg=PA4#v=onepage&q=uniting and dispersing tendencies&f=false)

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[23] para 25, Committee of Management Kanya Junior High School Bal Vidya Mandir, Etah, Uttar Pradesh v. Sachiv, U.P. Basic Shiksha Parishad, Allahabad, U.P. and Ors., Per Dalveer Bhandari J., Civil Appeal No. 9595 of 2003, decided On: 21.08.2006, Supreme Court of India

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Paksha

Paksha (Sanskrit: पक्ष), is a fortnight in a month of the Hindu lunar calendar. Literally meaning side or period, that is either side of the Full Moon Day or Purnima. Each month is divided into two fortnights, the period between New Moon Day and Full Moon Day is called *Shukla paksha* and the second fortnight of the month is called *Krishna-Paksha*, or the period of the fading moon.[1][2]

Festivals during Krishna Paksha

Day	Tithi	Festival	Month
4th Day	Chaturthi	Karva Chauth	Kartik
8th Day	Ashtami	Krishna Janmashtami	Bhadrapada
11th Day	Ekadasi	Vaikunta Ekadasi	Margashirsha
13th Day	Triodasi	Dhanteras	Ashvin
14th Day	Chaturdashi	Maha Shivaratri	Maagha
14th Day	Chaturdashi	Naraka Chaturdashi (Diwali)	Ashvin

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Krishna

Krishna	
Krishna holding flute	
Devanagari	कृष्ण
Sanskrit Transliteration	Kṛṣṇa
Affiliation	Svayam Bhagavan
Abode	Vrindavan, Gokul, Dwarka
Mantra	ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय
Weapon	Sudarshana Chakra
Consort	Radha, Rukmini, Satyabhama, Jambavati, Satya, Lakshmana, Kalindi, Bhadra, Mitravinda.
Mount	Garuda
Texts	*Bhagavata Purana, Bhagavad Gita, Mahabharata*

Krishna (Sanskrit: कृष्ण)(*kṛṣṇa* in IAST, pronounced Sanskrit pronunciation: [ˈkr̩ʂɳə] literally "dark, black, dark-blue"[1]) is a central figure of Hinduism and is traditionally attributed the authorship of the Bhagavad Gita. He is the supreme Being and considered in some monotheistic traditions as an Avatar of Vishnu . Krishna is identified as a historical individual who participated in the events of the Mahabharata.

Krishna is often described as an infant or young boy playing a flute as in the Bhagavata Purana,[2] or as a youthful prince giving direction and guidance as in the Bhagavad Gita.[3] The stories of Krishna appear across a broad spectrum of Hindu philosophical and theological traditions.[4] They portray him in various perspectives: a god-child, a prankster, a model lover, a divine hero and the Supreme Being.[5] The principal scriptures discussing Krishna's story are the Mahabharata, the Harivamsa, the Bhagavata Purana and the Vishnu Purana.

Worship of a deity of Krishna, in the form of *Vasudeva*, *Bala Krishna* or *Gopala*, can be traced to as early as 4th century BC.[6][7] Worship of Krishna as *svayam bhagavan*, or the Supreme Being, known as Krishnaism, arose in the Middle Ages in the context of the bhakti movement. From the 10th century AD, Krishna became a favorite subject in performing arts and regional traditions of devotion developed for forms of Krishna such as Jagannatha in Orissa, Vithoba in Maharashtra and Shrinathji in Rajasthan. The Gaudiya Vaishnavism sect of Krishnaism was established in the 16th century, and since the 1960s has also spread in the West, largely due to the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.[8]

Name and titles

The Sanskrit word *kṛṣṇa* is primarily an adjective meaning "black", "dark" or "dark-blue".,[1] sometimes it is also translated as "all attractive".[9] It is cognate with Slavic čьrnъ "black". As a feminine noun, *kṛṣṇā* is used in the meaning "night, blackness, darkness" in the Rigveda, and as a demon or spirit of darkness in RV 4.16.13. As a proper noun, *Kṛṣṇa* occurs in RV 8.85.3 as the name of a poet.[10] As a name of Vishnu, Krishna listed as the 57th name in the *Vishnu Sahasranama*. Based on his name, Krishna is often depicted in murtis as black or blue-skinned.

Krishna is also known by various other names, epithets and titles, which reflect his many associations and attributes. Among the most common names are *Govinda*, "finder of cows", or *Gopala*, "protector of cows", which refer to Krishna's childhood in Vraja.[11][12] Some of the distinct names may be regionally important; for instance, *Jagannatha* (literally "Lord of the Universe"), a popular deity of Puri in eastern India.[13]

14th century fresco of Krishna on interior wall City Palace, Udaipur

Iconography

Krishna with cows, herdsmen and Gopis, Pahari painting [Himalayan] from Smithsonian Institution

Krishna is easily recognized by his representations. Though his skin colour may be depicted as black or dark in some representations, particularly in murtis, in other images such as modern pictorial representations, Krishna is usually shown with blue skin. He is often shown wearing a yellow silk dhoti and peacock feather crown. Common depictions show him as a little boy, or as a young man in a characteristic relaxed pose, playing the flute.[14][15] In this form, he usually stands with one leg bent in front of the other and raises a flute to his lips, known as *Tribhangi Mudra*, accompanied by cows, emphasizing his position as the divine herdsman, *Govinda*, or with the gopis (milkmaids).

The scene on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, notably where he addresses Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita, is another common subject for representation. In these depictions, he is shown as a man, often with typical god-like characteristics of Hindu religious art, such as multiple arms or heads, denoting power, and with attributes of Vishnu, such as the chakra or in his two-armed form as a charioteer.

A 800 BC cave paintings in Mirzapur, Uttar Pradesh, North India, which show raiding horse-charioteers, one of whom is about to hurl such a wheel could potentially be identified as Krishna.[16]

Bala Krishna dancing, sculpture from National Museum, New Delhi.

A steatite tablet unearthed from Mohanjodaro depicting a young boy uprooting the two trees from which are emerging two human figures is an interesting archaeological finding for fixing the date of Krishna. This image recalls the Yamalarjuna episode of Bhagavata and Harivamsa Purana. In this image, the young boy depicted is undoubtedly Krishna and two human beings emerging out of the trees are the two cursed Gandharvas, identified as Nalkubara & Manigriva, who were turned into to two Arjuna trees or Yamalarjuna got liberated by Krishna. Dr. E.J.H. Mackay did the excavation at Mohanjodaro who compares this image with the Yamalarjuna episode. Prof. V.S. Agrawal has also accepted this identification. This seems that the Indus valley people knew Krishna's exploits and stories related to Krishna. However, this lone finding may not substantiate to corroborate with the date of Krishna contemporary to Pre-Indus or Indus times but at the same time it cannot be ignored.[17][18][19]

Representations in temples often show Krishna as a man standing in an upright, formal pose. He may be alone, or with associated figures:[20] his brother Balarama and sister Subhadra, or his main queens Rukmini and Satyabhama.

Often, Krishna is pictured with his gopi-consort Radha. Manipuri Vaishnavas do not worship Krishna alone, but as Radha Krishna,[21] a combined image of Krishna and Radha. This is also a characteristic of the schools Rudra[22] and Nimbarka sampradaya,[23] as well as that of Swaminarayan faith. The traditions celebrate Radha Ramana murti, who is viewed by Gaudiyas as a form of Radha Krishna.[24]

Krishna is also depicted and worshipped as a small child (*Bala Krishna*, bāla kṛṣṇa the child Krishna), crawling on his hands and knees or dancing, often with butter or Laddu in his hand being Laddu Gopal.[25][26] Regional variations in the iconography of Krishna are seen in his different forms, such as Jaganatha of Orissa, Vithoba of Maharashtra[27] and Shrinathji in Rajasthan.

Literary sources

Yashoda bathing the child Krishna. (Western Indian illustrated Bhagavata Purana Manuscript)

The earliest text to explicitly provide detailed descriptions of Krishna as a personality is the epic Mahābhārata which depicts Krishna as an incarnation of Vishnu.[28] Krishna is central to many of the main stories of the epic. The eighteen chapters of the sixth book (*Bhishma Parva*) of the epic that constitute the *Bhagavad Gita* contain the advice of Krishna to the warrior-hero Arjuna, on the battlefield. Krishna is already an adult in the epic, although there are allusions to his earlier exploits. The *Harivamsa*, a later appendix to this epic, contains the earliest detailed version of Krishna's childhood and youth.

In early texts, such as Rig Veda, there are no references to Krishna, however some, like Ramakrishna Gopal Bhandarkar attempted to show that "the very same Krishna" made an appearance, e.g. as the *drapsa ... krishna* "black drop" of RV 8.96.13. See Krishnasura[29][30] Some authors have also likened prehistoric depictions of deities to Krishna.

Chandogya Upanishad (3.17.6) Composed around 900BC-700BC mentions Vasudeva Krishna

> as the son of Devaki and the disciple of Ghora Angirasa , the seer who preached his disciple the philosophy of 'Chhandogya.' Having been influenced by the philosophy of 'Chhandogya' Krishna in the Bhagavadgita while delivering the discourse to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra discussed about sacrifice, which can be compared to purusha or the individual.

[17][31][32][33]

Yāska's *Nirukta*, an etymological dictionary around 6th century BC, contains a reference to the Shyamantaka jewel in the possession of Akrura, a motif from well known Puranic story about Krishna.[29] Shatapatha Brahmana and *Aitareya-Aranyaka*, associate Krishna with his Vrishni origins.[34]

Pāṇini, the ancient grammarian and author of Asthadhyayi (probably belonged to 5th century or 6th century BC) mentions a character called Vāsudeva, son of Vasudeva, and also mentions Kaurava and Arjuna which testifies to Vasudeva Krishna, Arjuna and Kauravas being contemporaries.[17][35][36]

Megasthenes (350 – 290 BC) a Greek ethnographer and an ambassador of Seleucus I to the court of Chandragupta Maurya mentioned about Herakles in his famous work Indica. Many scholars have suggested that the deity identified as Herakles was Krishna. According to Arrian, Diodorus, and Strabo, Megasthenes described an Indian tribe called Sourasenoi, who especially worshipped Herakles in their land, and this land had two cities, Methora and Kleisobora, and a navigable river, the Jobares. As was common in the ancient period, the Greeks sometimes described foreign gods in terms of their own divinities, and there is a little doubt that the Sourasenoi refers to the Shurasenas, a branch of the Yadu dynasty to which Krishna belonged; Herakles to Krishna, or Hari-Krishna: Methora to Mathura, where Krishna was born; Kleisobora to Krishnapura, meaning "the city of Krishna"; and the Jobares to the Yamuna, the famous river in the Krishna story. Quintus Curtius also mentions that when Alexander the Great confronted Porus, Porus's soldiers were carrying an image of Herakles in their vanguard.[37]

The name Kṛishṇa occurs in Buddhist writings in the form Kaṇha, phonetically equivalent to Kṛishṇa.[38]

The Ghata-Jâtaka (No. 454) gives an account of Kṛishṇa's childhood and subsequent exploits which in many points corresponds with the Brahmanic legends of his life and contains several familiar incidents and names, such as Vâsudeva, Baladeva, Kaṃsa. Yet it presents many peculiarities and is either an independent version or a misrepresentation of a popular story that had wandered far from its home. Jain tradition also shows that these tales were popular and were worked up into different forms, for the Jains have an elaborate system of ancient patriarchs which includes Vâsudevas and Baladevas. Kṛishṇa is the ninth of the Black Vâsudevas and is connected with Dvâravatî or Dvârakâ. He will become the twelfth tîrthankara of the next world-period and a similar position will be attained by Devakî, Rohinî, Baladeva and Javakumâra, all members of his family. This is a striking proof of the popularity of the Kṛishṇa legend outside the Brahmanic religion.[39]

According to Arthasastra of Kautilya (4th centuries CE) *Vāsudeva* was worshiped as supreme Deity in a strongly monotheistic format.[35]

Around 150 BC, Patanjali in his *Mahabhashya* quotes a verse: "May the might of Krishna accompanied by Samkarshana increase!" Other verses are mentioned. One verse speaks of "Janardhana with himself as fourth" (Krishna with three companions, the three possibly being Samkarshana, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha). Another verse mentions musical instruments being played at meetings in the temples of Rama (Balarama) and Kesava (Krishna). Patanjali also describes dramatic and mimetic performances (Krishna-Kamsopacharam) representing the killing of Kamsa by Vasudeva.[40]

In the 1st century BC, there seems to be evidence for a worship of five Vrishni heroes (Balarama, Krishna, Pradyumna, Aniruddha and Samba) for an inscription has been found at Mora near Mathura, which apparently

mentions a son of the great *satrap* Rajuvula, probably the *satrap* Sodasa, and an image of Vrishni, "probably Vasudeva, and of the "Five Warriors".[41] Brahmi inscription on the Mora stone slab, now in the Mathura Museum.[42][43]

Many Puranas tell Krishna's life-story or some highlights from it. Two Puranas, the *Bhagavata Purana* and the *Vishnu Purana*, that contain the most elaborate telling of Krishna's story and teachings are the most theologically venerated by the Vaishnava schools.[44] Roughly one quarter of the *Bhagavata Purana* is spent extolling his life and philosophy.

Life

This summary is based on details from the *Mahābhārata*, the *Harivamsa*, the *Bhagavata Purana* and the *Vishnu Purana*. The scenes from the narrative are set in north India, mostly in the present states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, Delhi and Gujarat.

Birth

Based on scriptural details and astrological calculations the date of Krishna's birth, known as Janmashtami,[45] is 18 July 3228 BCE and departed on 3102 BCE. Krishna belonged to the Vrishni clan of Yadavas from Mathura, and was the eighth son born to the princess Devaki, and her husband Vasudeva. Mathura was the capital of the Yadavas, to which Krishna's parents Vasudeva and Devaki belonged. The king Kansa, Devaki's brother,[46] had ascended the throne by imprisoning his father, King Ugrasena. Afraid of a prophecy that predicted his death at the hands of Devaki's eighth son, Kansa had the couple locked into a prison cell. After Kansa killed the first six children, and Devaki's apparent miscarriage of the seventh (which was actually a secret transfer of the infant to Rohini as Balarama), Krishna was born.

Since Vasudeva believed Krishna's life was in danger, Krishna was secretly taken out of the prison cell to be raised by his foster parents, Yasoda [47] and Nanda, in Gokula. Two of his other siblings also survived, Balarama (Devaki's seventh child, transferred to the womb of Rohini, Vasudeva's first wife) and Subhadra (daughter of Vasudeva and Rohini, born much later than Balarama and Krishna).[48] According to Bhagavata Purana divine Krishna was born without a sexual union, but by divine "mental transmission" from the mind of Vasudeva into the womb of Devaki.

Krishna Carried Across the River

Childhood and youth

Nanda was the head of a community of cow-herders, and he settled in Vrindavana. The stories of Krishna's childhood and youth tell how he became a cow herder,[49] his mischievous pranks as *Makhan Chor* (butter thief), his foiling of attempts to take his life, and his role as a protector of the people of Vrindavana.

Krishna killed the demoness like Putana, sent by Kansa for Krishna's life. He tamed the serpent Kāliyā, who previously poisoned the waters of Yamuna river, thus leading to the death of the cowherds. In Hindu art, Krishna is often depicted dancing on the multi-hooded Kāliyā.

Krishna lifted the Govardhana hill and taught Indra, the king of the devas and rain, a lesson to protect native people of Vrindavana from persecution by Indra and prevent the devastation of the pasture land of Govardhan. Indra had too much pride and was angry when Lord Krishna advised the people of Vrindavana to take care of their animals and their environment that provide them with all their necessities, instead of worshipping Indra annually by spending their resources.[50][51] In the view of some, the spiritual movement started by Lord Krishna had something in it which went against the orthodox forms of worship of the Vedic gods such as Indra.[52] In Bhagavat Purana, Lord Krishna says that the rain came from the nearby hill Govardhana, and advised that the people worshiped the hill instead of Indra. This made Indra furious, so he punished them by sending out a great storm. Lord Krishna then lifted Govardhan and held it over the people like an umbrella.

The stories of his play with the gopis (milkmaids) of Vrindavana, especially Radha (daughter of Vrishbhanu, one of the original residents of Vrindavan) became known as the *Rasa lila* and were romanticised in the poetry of Jayadeva, author of the Gita Govinda. These became important as part of the development of the Krishna bhakti traditions worshiping Radha Krishna.[53]

Krishna holding Govardhan hill as depicted in Pahari painting

The prince

On his return to Mathura as a young man, Krishna overthrew and killed his maternal uncle, Kansa, after avoiding several assassination attempts from Kansa's followers. He reinstated Kansa's father, Ugrasena, as the king of the Yadavas and became a leading prince at the court.[54] During this period, he became a friend of Arjuna and the other Pandava princes of the Kuru kingdom, who were his cousins. Later, he took his Yadava subjects to the city of Dwaraka (in modern Gujarat) and established his own kingdom there.[55]

Krishna with his two principal queens. (From left) Rukmini, Krishna, Satyabhama and his vahana Garuda.

Krishna married Rukmini, the Vidarbha princess, by abducting her,at her request, from her proposed wedding with Shishupala. Krishna subsequently married 16,100 maidens who were held captive by demon Narakasura, to save their honour.[56][57] of which eight were chief—collectively called the *Ashta Bharya*—including Rukmini, Satyabhama, Jambavati, Kalindi, Mitravrinda, Nagnajiti, Bhadra and Lakshana.[58][59] Krishna killed the demon and released them all. According to social custom of the time, all of the captive women were degraded, and would be unable to marry, as they had been under the Narakasura's control. However Krishna married them to reinstate their status in the society. This symbolic wedding with 16,000 abandoned daughters was more of a mass women rehabilitation.[60] In Vaishnava traditions, Krishna's wives are forms of the goddess Lakshmi— consort of Vishnu, or special souls who attained this qualification after many lifetimes of austerity, while his queen Satyabhama, is an expansion of Radha.[61]

When Yudhisthira was assuming the title of emperor, he had invited all the great kings to the ceremony and while paying his respects to them, he started with Krishna because he considered Krishna to be the greatest of them all. While it was a unanimous feeling amongst most present at the ceremony that Krishna should get the first honours, his cousin Shishupala felt otherwise and started berating Krishna. Due to a vow given to Shishupal's mother, Krishna forgave a hundred verbal abuses by Shishupal, and upon the one hundred and first, he assumed his Virat (universal) form and killed Shishupal with his Chakra. The blind king Dhritarashtra also obtained divine vision during this time to be able to see the Lord's form. Essentially, Shishupal and Dantavakra were both re-incarnations of Lord Vishnu's gate-keepers Jaya and Vijaya, who were cursed to be born on Earth, to be delivered by the Lord

back to Heaven.[62]

Kurukshetra War and Bhagavad Gita

Once battle seemed inevitable, Krishna offered both sides the opportunity to choose between having either his army called narayani sena or himself alone, but on the condition that he personally would not raise any weapon. Arjuna, on behalf of the Pandavas, chose to have Krishna on their side, and Duryodhana, Kaurava prince, chose Krishna's army. At the time of the great battle, Krishna acted as Arjuna's charioteer, since this position did not require the wielding of weapons.

Upon arrival at the battlefield, and seeing that the enemies are his family, his grandfather, his cousins and loved ones, Arjuna becomes doubtful about fight. He lost all his hopes and put down his *Gandiv* (Arjuna's bow). Krishna then advises him about the battle, with the conversation soon extending into a discourse which was later compiled as the Bhagavad Gita.[63]

Krishna displays his Vishvarupa (Universal Form) to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra.

Krishna had a profound effect on the Mahabharata war and its consequences. He considered the Kurukshetra war as a last resort by voluntarily making himself as a messenger in order to establish peace between the Pandavas and Kauravas. But, once these peace negotiations failed and was embarked into the war, then he became a ruthless strategist. During the war, upon becoming angry with Arjun for not fighting in true spirit against his ancestors, Krishna once picked up a carriage wheel and converted it to a Chakra (discus) to challenge Bhishma when the latter injured him. Upon seeing this, Bhishma dropped his weapons and asked Krishna to kill him. However, Arjuna apologized to Krishna, promising that he would fight with full dedication hereafter, and the battle continued. Krishna had directed Yudhisthira and Arjuna to return to Bhishma the boon of "victory" which he had given to Yudhisthira before the war commenced, since he himself was standing in their way to victory. Bhishma understood the message and told them the means through which he would drop his weapons—which was if a woman entered the battlefield. Next day, upon Krishna's directions, Shikhandi (Amba reborn) accompanied Arjuna to the battlefield and thus, Bhishma laid down his arms. This was a decisive moment in the war because Bhishma was the chief commander of the Kaurava army and the most formidable warrior on the battlefield. Krishna aided Arjuna in killing Jayadratha, who had held the other four Pandava brothers at bay while Arjuna's son Abhimanyu entered Drona's Chakravyuha formation—an effort in which he got killed by the simultaneous attack of eight Kaurava warriors. Krishna also caused the downfall of Drona, when he signalled Bhima to kill an elephant called Ashwatthama, the namesake of Drona's son. Pandavas started shouting that Ashwatthama was dead but Drona refused to believe them saying he would believe it only if he heard it from Yudhisthira. Krishna knew that Yudhisthira would never tell a lie, so he devised a clever ploy so that Yudhisthira wouldn't lie and at the same time Drona would be convinced of his son's death. On asked by Drona, Yudhisthira proclaimed

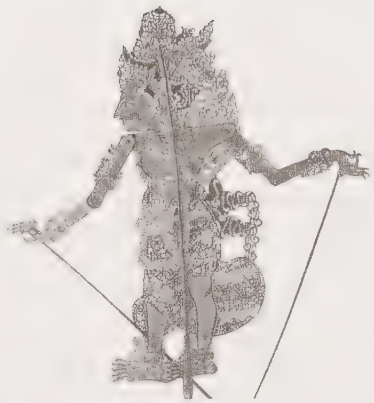
Ashwathama Hatahath, naro va Kunjaro va

i.e. Ashwathama had died but he was nor sure whether it was a Drona's son or an elephant. But as soon as Yudhisthira had uttered the first line, Pandava army on Krishna's direction broke into celebration with drums and conchs, in the din of which Drona could not hear the second part of the Yudhisthira's declaration and assumed that his son indeed was dead. Overcome with grief he laid down his arms, and on Krishna's instruction Dhrishtadyumna beheaded Drona.

When Arjuna was fighting Karna, the latter's chariot's wheels sank into the ground. While Karna was trying to take out the chariot from the grip of the Earth, Krishna reminded Arjuna how Karna and the other Kauravas had broken all rules of battle while simultaneously attacking and killing Abhimanyu, and he convinced Arjuna to do the same in revenge in order to kill Karna. During the final stage of the war, when Duryodhana was going to meet his mother Gandhari for taking her blessings which would convert all parts of his body on which her sight falls to steel, Krishna tricks him to wearing banana leaves to hide his groin. When Duryodhana meets Gandhari, her vision and blessings fall on his entire body except his groin and thighs, and she becomes unhappy about it because she was not able to convert his entire body to steel. When Duryodhana was in a mace-fight with Bhima, Bhima's blows had no effect on Duryodhana. Upon this, Krishna reminded Bhima of his vow to kill Duryodhana by hitting him on the thigh, and Bhima did the same to win the war despite it being against the rules of mace-fight (since Duryodhana had himself broken Dharma in all his past acts). Thus, Krishna's unparalleled strategy helped the Pandavas win the Mahabharata war by bringing the downfall of all the chief Kaurava warriors, without lifting any weapon. He also brought back to life Arjuna's grandson Parikshit, who had been attacked by a Brahmastra weapon from Ashwatthama while he was in his mother's womb. Parikshit became the Pandavas' successor.

Family

Krishna had a total of 16,108 wives, out of which eight were his princely wives and 16,100 were rescued from Narakasura, who had forcibly kept them in his harem, but all of them are considered to be incarnations of Goddess Lakshmi.[64][65]



Krishna in Balinese Wayang form

The first son of Queen Rukmini was Pradyumna, and also born of her were Charudeshna, Sudeshna and the powerful Charudeha, along with Sucharu, Chharugupta, Bhadracaru, Charuchandra, Vicaru and Caru, the tenth. Pradyumna fathered the greatly powerful Aniruddha in the womb of Rukmavati, the daughter of Rukmi. This took place while they were living in the city of Bhojakata.

The ten sons of Satyabhama were Bhanu, Subhanu, Svarbhanu, Prabhanu, Bhanuman, Chandrabhanu, Brihadbhanu, Atibhanu (the eighth), Sribhanu and Pratibhanu.

Samba, Sumitra, Purujit, Satajit, Sahasrajit, Vijaya, Citraketu, Vasuman, Dravida and Kratu were the sons of Jambavati. These ten, headed by Samba, were their father's favorites.

The sons of Nagnajiti were Vira, Candra, Asvasena, Citragu, Vegavan, Vrisha, Ama, Sanku, Vasu and the opulent Kunti.

Sruta, Kavi, Vrisha, Vira, Subahu, Bhadra, Santi, Darsa and Purnamasa were sons of Kalindi. Her youngest son was Somaka.

Madra's sons were Praghosha, Gatravan, Simha, Bala, Prabala, Urdhaga, Mahasakti, Saha, Oja and Aparajita.

Mitravinda's sons were Vrika, Harsha, Anila, Gridhra, Vardhana, Unnada, Mahamsa, Pavana, Vahni and Kshudhi.

Sangramajit, Brihatsena, Sura, Praharana, Arijith, Jaya and Subhadra were the sons of Bhadra, together with Vama, Ayur and Satyaka.

Diptiman, Tamratapta and others were the sons of Lord Krishna and Rohini.

Temple car carving of Krishna playing flute with Radha, suchindram, tamil nadu

Later life

Curse of Gandhari According to Mahabharata, Kurukshetra resulted in the death of all the hundred sons of Gandhari. Night before death of Duryodhana, Lord Krishna visited Gandhari to offer his condolence.Gandhari felt that Krishna knowingly didn't put an end to the war,In a fit of rage and sorrow, Gandhari cursed that Lord Krishna will perish after 36 years including everyone from yadu dynasty.[66][67][68]

At a festival, a fight broke out between the Yadavas who exterminated each other. His elder brother Balarama then gave up his body using Yoga. Krishna retired into the forest and sat under a tree in meditation. While the Mahabharata narrates the story that a hunter named Jara mistook his partly visible left foot for a deer and shot an arrow wounding him mortally; while Krishna's soul ascended to heaven, his mortal body was cremated by Arjuna.[69][70][71]

According to Puranic sources,[72] Krishna's disappearance marks the end of Dvapara Yuga and the start of Kali Yuga, which is dated to February 17/18, 3102 BCE.[73] Vaishnava teachers such as Ramanujacharya and Gaudiya Vaishnavas held the view that the body of Krishna is completely spiritual and never decays as this appears to be the perspective of the Bhagavata Purana. Krishna never appears to grow old or age at all in the historical depictions of the Puranas despite passing of several decades, but there are grounds for a debate whether this indicates that he has no material body, since battles and other descriptions of the Mahabhārata epic show clear indications that he seems to be subject to the limitations of nature.[74] While battles apparently seem to indicate limitations, Mahabharatha also shows in many places where Krishna is not subject to any limitations as through episodes Duryodhana trying to arrest Krishna where his body burst into fire showing all creation within him.[75] Krishna is also explicitly described as without deterioration elsewhere.[76]

Worship

Vaishnavism

Rasa Lila in Manipuri dance style.

The worship of Krishna is part of Vaishnavism, which regards Vishnu as the Supreme God and venerates His associated Avatars, their consorts, and related saints and teachers. Krishna is especially looked upon as a full manifestation of Vishnu, and as one with Vishnu himself.[77] However the exact relationship between Krishna and Vishnu is complex and diverse,[78] where Krishna is sometimes considered an independent deity, supreme in his own right.[79] Out of many deities, Krishna is particularly important, and traditions of Vaishnava lines are generally centered either on Vishnu or on Krishna, as supreme. The term Krishnaism has been used to describe the sects of Krishna, reserving term "Vaishnavism" for sects focusing on Vishnu in which Krishna is an Avatar, rather than as a transcendent Supreme Being.[80]

All Vaishnava traditions recognise Krishna as an avatar of Vishnu; others identify Krishna with Vishnu; while traditions, such as Gaudiya Vaishnavism,[81][82] Vallabha Sampradaya and the Nimbarka Sampradaya, regard Krishna as the *svayam bhagavan*, original form of God, or the Lord himself.[83][84][85][86][87] Swaminarayan, the founder of the Swaminarayan Sampraday also worshipped Krishna as God himself. "Greater Krishnaism" corresponds to the second and dominant phase of Vaishnavism, revolving around the cults of the Vasudeva, Krishna, and Gopala of late Vedic period.[88] Today the faith has a significant following outside of India as well.[89]

Early traditions

An image of Bala Krishna displayed during Janmashtami celebrations at a Swaminarayan Temple in London

The deity *Krishna-Vasudeva* (*kṛṣṇa vāsudeva* "Krishna, the son of Vasudeva") is historically one of the earliest forms of worship in Krishnaism and Vaishnavism.[6][29] It is believed to be a significant tradition of the early history of the worship of Krishna in antiquity.[7][90] This tradition is considered as earliest to other traditions that led to amalgamation at a later stage of the historical development. Other traditions are Bhagavatism and the cult of Gopala, that along with the cult of Bala Krishna form the basis of current tradition of monotheistic religion of Krishna.[91][92] Some early scholars would equate it with Bhagavatism,[7] and the founder of this religious tradition is believed to be Krishna, who is the son of Vasudeva, thus his name is *Vāsudeva*; he is said to be historically part of the Satvata tribe, and according to them his followers called themselves Bhagavatas and this religion had formed by the 2nd century BC (the time of Patanjali), or as early as the 4th century BC according to evidence in Megasthenes and in the Arthasastra of Kautilya, when *Vāsudeva* was worshiped as supreme deity in a strongly monotheistic format, where the supreme being was perfect, eternal and full of grace.[71] In many sources outside of the cult, the devotee or bhakta is defined as *Vāsudevaka*.[93] The Harivamsa describes intricate relationships between Krishna Vasudeva, Sankarsana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha that would later form a Vaishnava concept of primary quadrupled expansion, or avatar.[94]

Bhakti tradition

Bhakti, meaning devotion, is not confined to any one deity. However Krishna is an important and popular focus of the devotional and ecstatic aspects of Hindu religion, particularly among the Vaishnava sects.[81][95] Devotees of Krishna subscribe to the concept of *lila*, meaning 'divine play', as the central principle of the Universe. The *lilas* of Krishna, with their expressions of personal love that transcend the boundaries of formal reverence, serve as a counterpoint to the actions of another avatar of Vishnu: Rama, "He of the straight and narrow path of *maryada*, or rules and regulations."[82]

The bhakti movements devoted to Krishna became prominent in southern India in the 7th to 9th centuries AD. The earliest works included those of the Alvar saints of the Tamil country.[96] A major collection of their works is the *Divya Prabandham*. The Alvar Andal's popular collection of songs Tiruppavai, in which she conceives of herself as a gopi, is the most famous of the oldest works in this genre.[97][98] [99] Kulasekaraazhvaar's Mukundamala was another notable work of this early stage.

Spread of the Krishna-bhakti movement

Gita Govinda by Jayadeva.

The movement spread rapidly from northern India into the south, with the Sanskrit poem *Gita Govinda* of Jayadeva (12th century AD) becoming a landmark of devotional, Krishna-based literature. It elaborated a part of the Krishna legend—his love for one particular gopi, called Radha, a minor character in *Bhagavata Purana* but a major one in other texts like *Brahma Vaivarta Purana*. By the influence of *Gita Govinda*, Radha became inseparable from devotion to Krishna.[]

While the learned sections of the society well versed in Sanskrit could enjoy works like *Gita Govinda* or Bilvamangala's *Krishna-Karnamritam*, the masses sang the songs of the devotee-poets, who composed in the regional languages of India. These songs expressing intense personal devotion were written by devotees from all walks of life. The songs of Meera and Surdas became epitomes of Krishna-devotion in north India.

These devotee-poets, like the Alvars before them, were aligned to specific theological schools only loosely, if at all. But by the 11th century AD, Vaishnava Bhakti schools with elaborate theological frameworks around the worship of Krishna were established in north India. Nimbarka (11th century AD), Vallabhacharya (15th century AD) and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (16th century AD) were the founders of the most influential schools. These schools, namely Nimbarka Sampradaya, Vallabha Sampradaya and Gaudiya Vaishnavism respectively, see Krishna as the supreme god, rather than an avatar, as generally seen.

In the Deccan, particularly in Maharashtra, saint poets of the Varkari sect such as Dnyaneshwar, Namdev, Janabai, Eknath and Tukaram promoted the worship of Vithoba,[27] a local form of Krishna, from the beginning of the 13th century until the late 18th century.[] In southern India, Purandara Dasa and Kanakadasa of Karnataka composed songs devoted to the Krishna image of Udupi. Rupa Goswami of Gaudiya Vaishnavism, has compiled a comprehensive summary of bhakti named Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu.[95]

Krishna (left) with the flute with gopi-consort Radha, Bhaktivedanta Manor, Watford, England

In the West

Since 1966, the Krishna-bhakti movement has also spread outside India. This is largely due to the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), popularly known as the Hare Krishna movement.[8] The movement was founded by Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, who was instructed by his guru, Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, to write about Krishna in English and to share the Gaudiya Vaishnava philosophy with people in the Western world.[100]

In the performing arts

A Kathakali performer as Krishna

While discussing the origin of Indian theatre, Horwitz talks about the mention of the Krishna story in Patanjali's Mahabhashya (c. 150 BC), where the episodes of slaying of Kamsa (Kamsa Vadha) and "Binding of the heaven storming titan" (Bali Bandha) are described.[101] Bhasa's *Balacharitam* and *Dutavakyam* (c. 400 BC) are the only Sanskrit plays centered on Krishna written by a major classical dramatist. The former dwells only on his childhood exploits and the latter is a one-act play based on a single episode from the *Mahābhārata* when Krishna tries to make peace between the warring cousins.[102]

From the 10th century AD, with the growing bhakti movement, Krishna became a favorite subject of the arts. The songs of the *Gita Govinda* became popular across India, and had many imitations. The songs composed by the Bhakti poets added to the repository of both folk and classical singing.

The classical Indian dances, especially Odissi and Manipuri, draw heavily on the story. The 'Rasa lila' dances performed in Vrindavan shares elements with Kathak, and the Krisnattam, with some cycles, such as Krishnattam, traditionally restricted to the Guruvayur temple, the precursor of Kathakali.[103]

The Sattriya dance, founded by the Assamese Vaishnava saint Sankardeva, extols the virtues of Krishna. Medieval Maharashtra gave birth to a form of storytelling known as the *Hari-Katha*, that told Vaishnava tales and teachings through music, dance, and narrative sequences, and the story of Krishna one of them. This tradition spread to Tamil Nadu and other southern states, and is now popular in many places throughout India.

Narayana Tirtha's (17th century AD) *Krishna-Lila-Tarangini* provided material for the musical plays of the *Bhagavata-Mela* by telling the tale of Krishna from birth until his marriage to Rukmini. Tyagaraja (18th century AD) wrote a similar piece about Krishna called *Nauka-Charitam*. The narratives of Krishna from the Puranas are performed in Yakshagana, a performance style native to Karnataka's coastal districts. Many movies in all Indian languages have been made based on these stories. These are of varying quality and usually add various songs, melodrama, and special effects.

In other religions

Jainism

The most exalted figures in Jainism are the twenty-four Tirthankaras. Krishna, when he was incorporated into the Jain list of heroic figures presented a problem with his activities which are not pacifist or non-violent. The concept of Baladeva, Vasudeva and Prati-Vasudeva was used to solve it. The Jain list of sixty-three Shalakapurshas or notable figures includes amongst others, the twenty-four Tirthankaras and nine sets of this triad. One of these triads is Krishna as the Vasudeva, Balarama as the Baladeva and Jarasandha as the Prati-Vasudeva. He was a cousin of the twenty-second Tirthankara, Neminatha. The stories of these triads can be found in the *Harivamsha* of Jinasena (not be confused with its namesake, the addendum to *Mahābhārata*) and the *Trishashti-shalakapurusha-charita* of Hemachandra.[104]

In each age of the Jain cyclic time is born a Vasudeva with an elder brother termed the Baladeva. The villain is the Prati-vasudeva. Baladeva is the upholder of the Jain principle of non-violence. However, Vasudeva has to forsake this principle to kill the Prati-Vasudeva and save the world. [105][106]

Buddhism

The story of Krishna occurs in the Jataka tales in Buddhism,[107] in the Ghatapandita Jataka as a prince and legendary conqueror and king of India.[108] In the Buddhist version, Krishna is called *Vasudeva*, *Kanha* and Keshava, and Balarama is his younger brother, Baladeva. These details resemble that of the story given in the Bhagavata Purana. Vasudeva, along with his nine other brothers (each son a powerful wrestler) and one elder sister (Anjana) capture all of Jambudvipa (many consider this to be India) after beheading their evil uncle, King Kamsa, and later all other kings of Jambudvipa with his Sudarshana Chakra. Much of the story involving the defeat of Kamsa follows the story given in the Bhagavata Purana.[109]

As depicted in the Mahābhārata, all of the sons are eventually killed due to a curse of sage Kanhadipayana (Veda Vyasa, also known as Krishna Dwaipayana). Krishna himself is eventually speared by a hunter in the foot by mistake, leaving the sole survivor of their family being their sister, Anjanadevi of whom no further mention is made.[110]

Since Jataka tales are given from the perspective of Buddha's previous lives (as well as the previous lives of many of Buddha's followers), Krishna appears as one of the lives of Sariputra, one of Buddha's foremost disciples and the "Dhammasenapati" or "Chief General of the Dharma" and is usually shown being Buddha's "right hand man" in Buddhist art and iconography.[111] The Bodhisattva, is born in this tale as one of his youngest brothers named Ghatapandita, and saves Krishna from the grief of losing his son.[108] The 'divine boy' Krishna as an embodiment of wisdom and endearing prankster forms a part of worshipable pantheon in Japanese Buddhism.[112]

Depiction of Krishna playing flute in the temple constructed in AD 752 on the order of Emperor Shomu; Todai-ji Temple, Great Buddha Hall in Nara, Japan

Bahá'í Faith

Bahá'ís believe that Krishna was a "Manifestation of God", or one in a line of prophets who have revealed the Word of God progressively for a gradually maturing humanity. In this way, Krishna shares an exalted station with Abraham, Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Muhammad, Jesus, the Báb, and the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh.[113]

Ahmadiyya Islam

Members of the Ahmadiyya Community believe Krishna to be a great prophet of God as described by their founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. Ghulam Ahmad also claimed to be the likeness of Krishna as a latter day reviver of religion and morality whose mission was to reconcile man with God.[114] Ahmadis maintain that the term *Avatar* is synonymous with the term 'prophet' of the middle eastern religious tradition as God's intervention with man; as God appoints a man as his vicegerent upon earth. In *Lecture Sialkot*, Ghulam Ahmed wrote:

> Let it be clear that Raja Krishna, according to what has been revealed to me, was such a truly great man that it is hard to find his like among the Rishis and Avatars of the Hindus. He was an Avatar—i.e., Prophet—of his time upon whom the Holy Spirit would descend from God. He was from God, victorious and prosperous. He cleansed the land of the Aryas from sin and was in fact the Prophet of his age whose teaching was later corrupted in numerous ways. He was full of love for God, a friend of virtue and an enemy of evil.[114]

Krishna is also called Murli Dhar. The flute of Krishna means the flute of revealation and not the physical flute. Krishna lived like humans and he was a prophet[115][116]

Other

Krishna worship or reverence has been adopted by several new religious movements since the 19th century, and he is sometimes a member of an eclectic pantheon in occult texts, along with Greek, Buddhist, Biblical and even historical figures.[117] For instance, Édouard Schuré, an influential figure in perennial philosophy and occult movements, considered Krishna a *Great Initiate*; while Theosophists regard Krishna as an incarnation of Maitreya (one of the Masters of the Ancient Wisdom), the most important spiritual teacher for humanity after Buddha.[118][119] Krishna was canonized by Aleister Crowley and is recognized as a saint in the Gnostic Mass of Ordo Templi Orientis.[120][121]

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